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THE MISTRESS OF COON HALL

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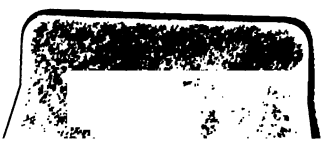

THE MISTRESS OF COON HALL,

OR

THE LAST OF THE WYBEERS.

THE

MISTRESS OF COON HALL,

OR

THE LAST OF THE WYBEERS.

A Tale.

BY

MARGARET R. CARTMELL,

Author of "The Viking."

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THE MISTRESS OF COON HALL,

OR

THE LAST OF THE WYBEERS.

CHAPTER I.

"How strange that so small a thing as a letter should so change the course of our lives."

It was a bright morning in May; the sun was shining with that peculiar brilliancy belonging to that so much desired, so rarely seen thing, real May weather. The chestnuts bursting into blossom waved their red and white cones glistening with the dew; the sheep and cattle scattered in the park-like paddock leading up to Fernleigh House seemed as if they could not contain themselves for joy, but as if they must needs spring about, and could by no means stay quietly feeding in one spot.

And within the house there was a brightness corresponding to that without; the party of young people assembled round the breakfast-table, varying in age from seven to twenty-two, were talking with the merry

freedom known but to large, happy home-parties, only interrupted now and then when the mother desired silence that she might put some necessary inquiry to one or other member of the circle, or the father addressed some question to his eldest son, just come home for the vacation from Cambridge. The postman's knock was heard at the door, and Herbert went to fetch the letters; as usual, a great pile for the father, several for the mother, one or so each for the elder girls. The brothers, having no letters of their own, were particularly anxious to view their sisters' epistles, which the young ladies not approving, it ended in their putting the letters away to await a more convenient season. The mother, too, having nothing of importance, the conversation was resumed as merrily as before, no one noticing for some time that the father was looking disturbed, not to say distressed. At last he laid down a letter with a black border, with which he had been for some minutes engaged, and gazed out of the window with an absent, perplexed expression.

"Anything the matter, my dear?" said his wife.

"Well, yes," he answered, looking back at the breakfast-table; "Mrs. Boston is dead!"

"I am indeed sorry to hear that," said Mrs. Kempthorn; "though she has been so long an invalid, one had no notion the end was so near. What will become of poor Alice Montague?"

"She must live here," answered the Major. "Young Mr. Boston has written to tell me of his mother's death, and to ask me what I would wish to be done, for of course things cannot go on as they have done."

"No, I suppose not," said Mrs. Kempthorn. "What a pity that he is not already married."

"Even if he were," said the Major, quickly, "she could not live with them; Alice will be too great an heiress to be left to the guardianship of a young married couple, however amiable and estimable they may be. The only reason that she did not come straight here when old Mr. Boston died, who together with myself was left her guardian, was that Mrs. Boston begged not to be separated from her, she had lived so long with them, and was so much attached to them."

"You will go yourself to fetch her?" said his wife.

"I do not know," replied the Major, and grew absent again.

Breakfast being now concluded, they separated to their different occupations or amusements. Mrs. Kempthorn, having given her daughters some directions, was about to proceed on her domestic avocations, when the Major called to her, "My dear, can I speak to you?"

She stepped into the study; he shut the door, then, leaning his elbow on the chimney-piece, said with half-averted face, "Old General Berriton died on Sunday morning!"

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Kempthorn, waiting for further information.

"You know," continued the Major, "that he was a sort of connection of mine, that is to say, my mother was his cousin, the daughter of his father's elder sister; but there had been disagreements in the family, and we never knew anything about our grandmother's relations. The General, who was a bachelor, has

survived all his brothers and sisters. His father was twice married, and I *believe*, though I am by no means sure, that the General was the son of the second marriage. One of his sisters married a distant cousin of her own name, but they both died after little more than a year's marriage, and the General has brought up his orphan niece, I believe, on a plan of his own. However, he seems to have recollected the claims of kindred, for the lawyer has written to me to beg me to go, saying that he has left me £1,500, and the guardianship of his orphan niece."

"Poor little thing," said Mrs. Kempthorn, "how very sad for her never to have known her parents, and then thus a second time to be left alone in the world; we must have her to live here."

"Take care what you are doing," said the Major; "you are not likely to find a Berriton of Cairniebrow Hall a very amenable inmate."

"She cannot be anything so very outrageous and rebellious."

"Read that," was all the Major answered, handing to her a letter written in a beautifully clear hand, and bearing the marks of more decision than seemed exactly to suit with the person to whom Mrs. Kempthorn's title of "poor little thing" could be applied.

"SIR,

"Mr. Thornby" ("the lawyer," put in the Major) "having informed me that, according to the desire of my deceased uncle, he has written to you to inform you of what has happened, I venture to send you these few lines, to say that as you are the only

connection of the family with whom to communicate, everything shall be arranged to best suit your convenience. The funeral has been fixed for Friday; should that day, however, not agree with your plans, if you will have the kindness to telegraph, another day shall be chosen.

"Believe me, yours truly,

"ISABELLA BERRITON."

"How old is this girl?" was all Mrs. Kempthorn trusted herself to say when she had completed the perusal of this extraordinary letter.

"She cannot be more than twenty," answered the Major, drily.

"Poor thing," again exclaimed Mrs. Kempthorn, "that General must have dried her up, must have frozen her; she cannot know what love is; we must have her here to soften her, and make her happy."

"I am glad that you still keep to that notion," said her husband, "as I really do not know what else can be done; she is too old to be sent to school, and too young to have a house of her own, but I shall see how matters stand. I have been thinking it over, and I find that by starting from here by the mid-day train I can reach Cairniebrow Hall by 9.30, which will give me to-morrow, Thursday, before the funeral; fortunately I know Mr. Thornby, which will much simplify everything. It is but proper respect to the General's memory that we should go into mourning; besides, you and the girls being in black will less jar upon Alice first coming here."

"I had nearly forgotten Alice, in the midst of this

more exciting news," said Mrs. Kempthorn; "what is to be done about her?"

"I think you had better go to fetch her, for I do not know how long I may be detained at Cairniebrow; there may be much to settle; Miss Berriton may prove contumacious. I am rather curious to see her; she seems to be much more in the position of one who can protect others than in that of needing a guardian herself."

"I wish I were going for her," said Mrs. Kempthorn. "I so fear you will be hard upon her, and I am sure she must be very miserable."

The Major laughed and shrugged his shoulders, and the conversation closed, each setting about the preparations for the different departures. The Major's was to take place that day, his wife's as soon as it should be convenient to young Mr. Boston to receive her.

The Kempthorns were wealthy; even when Adela Graves married Herbert Kempthorn, though he was only a lieutenant in the army, he had a large private fortune, and since then he had risen by successive steps, until he was now a major in the —th regiment. He had been badly wounded in the Abyssinian war, and had a year's leave of absence in consequence; he expected to rejoin his regiment in August. He was a man of a little over forty, tall and handsome, with polished manners, and looking almost too young to be the father of a son so old as Herbert. He had strong feelings of honour and uprightness, was kind-hearted, but withal had a keen, dry humour that made him rather dreaded by his acquaintance; was a most

strict Conservative, and regarded all innovation as at best very foolish, and most likely wrong and dangerous. Mrs. Kempthorn was one of those happy, sunny-hearted people who always look on the best side of men and things; she was overflowing with affection, and, as if her own children were not enough for her love, she was longing to embrace her husband's two orphan wards; and Isabella Berriton's letter, which with many people would have created a prejudice against her, only the more strongly prepossessed her in the girl's favour, as making her believe that she had been harshly and unsympathetically treated, and therefore the more needing the softening of warm affection.

About eight o'clock that same evening Major Kempthorn got out of the train at the little station of Leckfield, in the north of Yorkshire. His first inquiry was for a conveyance to take him to Cairniebrow Hall. There was nothing to be had but an open dog-cart; however, as the night was fine, this did not much matter, and he was soon driving over the moor in a high-wheeled vehicle drawn by a spirited and rather unbroken horse. The weather, as he learnt from his driver, had been for some time very wet, and the water was lying in many places. When the moon was hidden, as she often was, by masses of drifting cloud, it was almost dark, and when she shone out for a few moments the Major was able to see a wide expanse of open country, looking wild and desolate in the dim light, and bounded by hills on either side. The wind blew with that vigorous freshness only to be felt on high moorland.

Major Kempthorn endeavoured to obtain some

information from his driver as to the people in the neighbourhood, but the boy, though intelligent and civil, was a stranger to these parts, and could tell him but little, and very soon the difficulties of the road occupied all his attention.

It was only a rough track over the moor; the wheels splashed into pools at every step, and the gig was made to rock by the ruts over which they were driving. Presently they made a sharp turn; there was no longer even the slight path that they had had hitherto, and it needed considerable ingenuity on the part of the driver to guide his vehicle, and prevent its being overturned by the tufts of heather, etc., and the Major saw that it would be very late before they reached Cairniebrow Hall. He began to repent not having remained at Leckfield for the night.

They had been for some time steadily ascending, and as they approached the top of the hill the air grew fresher and fresher, and the road more and more rough. The horse for some distance had been rather restive, but when they arrived at the summit, and saw before them a steep descent to the valley, he began to plunge, and it required all the strength and skill of his young driver to control him.

"I think something has gone wrong," said the boy; "if you would hold the reins, sir, for one minute I will get down and look."

The Major complied. Perhaps the change to the strong, practised hand had some effect in calming the horse, anyhow he stood quite still while the driver examined the harness.

"A trace broken, sir," he reported. "Do you hap-

pen, sir, to have a bit of cord with you, that I might mend it?"

"No," said the Major, who certainly had not foreseen such a catastrophe. "What is to be done now? Do you expect me to walk the remainder of the way? At that rate I shall scarcely be there by midnight."

"Oh no, sir," replied the lad. "Do you see that light down there in the valley? That is old Biddy's cottage. If you would walk forward, sir—you cannot miss the way—turn to the right when you get to the bottom of the hill—she will give us a bit of rope or something to mend the trace with. I will lead the horse down, we shall do it quickest that way."

In spite of his annoyance, the Major could hardly help laughing, the boy's manner was so very cool, and it was such a wild thing to do, to go to an old woman's cottage to get something with which to mend the trace. But what else could be done? It was no good scolding the boy, as to all his remonstrances the lad only answered, "Well, sir, the dog-cart is not mine, but master's;" so he resolved to make the best of his way to the old woman's hut, devoutly hoping that she might be able to afford him aid.

The side of the hill was grassy, and, as far as he could discern in the twilight, it seemed very much as if they had come by a side road, across country. So steep was the slope that he really felt glad when he got to the bottom that he had come down it on foot, and he looked back rather anxiously to where he could just see his driver carefully leading his horse. Meditating a lecture to the careless master who had sent him, as he believed, with so incompetent a driver, he

walked briskly along the lane in which he now found himself until he reached the cottage where they had seen the light, and which stood in a small garden. He lifted the latch of the little gate, and went up to the porch, and knocked at the door, which was almost immediately opened by a little brisk dame in a striped black and blue petticoat, with a scarlet shawl folded over her shoulders, and the whitest of caps upon her head. She peered into the gloom, and seeing the gentleman—"And what may ye want at this time of night?" she said.

"Good evening," answered the Major. "I have met with an accident on the side of the hill; one of the traces is broken, and I came to see if you could give me a piece of cord to mend it."

"Oh yes," she answered, as if this were a most usual request; "will ye not step in a bit while I seek it? Ye are not alone surely?"

"No," replied the Major; "my driver is leading the horse, but I came on to save as much time as possible, as it is getting late."

"Step in then, sir," said the old dame.

He did so, and found himself in a small but clean, cosy little room, with an old-fashioned Dutch clock ticking in one corner, and a sandy cat curled up on a chair. While searching for the cord in a large and apparently untidy chest, Biddy continued talking. She asked the Major if he belonged to these parts, and when she heard he was a stranger, she inquired whither he was going.

"To Cairniebrow Hall," he answered.

"Ah," she said, "maybe ye have heard that the General is dead?"

"Yes," replied Major Kempthorn; "did you know him?"

"Who is that that speaks of Ralph Berriton?" demanded a peremptory voice close beside him.

He started, and perceived, standing at the foot of the stairs, the oddest figure it had ever been his lot to see. It was that of a woman, wearing on her head a black hood lined with scarlet, beneath which escaped her dark hair streaked with grey; her dress was of black cloth, perfectly plain, and over her right shoulder she wore, scarfwise, a brilliant scarlet shawl. But if the peculiarity, not to say ridiculousness, of this costume made you inclined to laugh, all such desire was checked when you glanced at the face of the wearer, so wildly mournful was the expression of the colourless features and deep dark eyes. Once she must have been strikingly handsome, and even now there was the remains of beauty in the regular outlines, and in the arched eyebrows, which still retained the colour and thickness of youth. You had an instinctive feeling that before you there stood a cruelly-wronged being, while the next moment the glittering eye and firmly-set lips forbade any idea that she was an oppressed or meekly suffering one; and her voice, as she repeated her question, "Who speaks of Ralph Berriton?" though abrupt, had still something in it of sweetness and refinement.

The Major did not consider it incumbent upon him to answer so strangely put a question with anything more than a cool, "A stranger who has business at Cairniebrow Hall."

"Will you not answer my question directly?" said his interrogator.

"My good woman, what can it concern you to know who I am?"

"Good woman, indeed!" repeated the other, scornfully; "you know not whom you are addressing. But I *will* know," she added, stamping her foot.

At that moment a little black kitten issued from under her shawl, and perched itself upon her shoulder. There was something so weird-like in the whole figure that the Major was forcibly reminded of a witch, and in spite of his irritation and firm conviction that the woman was drunk, he could hardly help laughing, when Biddy, who had hitherto been a silent spectator of the scene, came across the room under pretence of getting a key that was hanging on the wall. She said to him in a low, awe-struck tone, "Ye maun do as she tell you; they come to nae gude who cross her."

Major Kempthorn was amazed. He had no idea that so seemingly respectable a woman as Biddy would have been so superstitious; but, suspecting from her accent in this last speech that she was Scotch, he considered it partly accounted for by her nationality, and thinking it best to humour her, he turned towards his questioner, who was regarding him very much as a tiger might watch its prey—quiet while he remained motionless, but ready to spring should he make the least movement towards escape—and with more ceremony than he had hitherto used, "Madam," he said, "since you seem to desire to know it, my name is Kempthorn, of the —th Regiment. Being a distant connection of the late General Berriton, I am on my way to Cairniebrow Hall to be present at his funeral, and also to attend to matters of business."

"At last you have given a plain answer to a plain question," said the other. "Well—no," she added, suddenly breaking off, "I will not say it now, the time has not yet come. Farewell, Biddy; thank you for your hospitality. Accept this as a slight remuneration for your trouble."

She laid a coin upon the table, and swept by the Major, who now perceived, to his unutterable astonishment, that she wore round her throat a *diamond* necklace, ending in a superb clasp which fastened her shawl, and with that clasp the kitten, balancing itself upon her shoulder, was playing like a little black demon. The next moment she was gone, and the Major, passing his hand over his eyes to assure himself that he was not dreaming, hastily demanded of Biddy who or what that extraordinary personage was.

But Biddy either could or would tell him nothing. "She didna know her. Better not talk of sic folk. Yes, she saw her now and then, mairs the pity." She handed him the piece of cord he had come to beg.

The Major, in imitation of the visitor who had just departed, offered her a trifle for her trouble, but she refused, saying in the bright, cheery tone she had used when she had first spoken to him, and without the least Scotch accent, "No, no; I have only done for you what one Christian ought to do for another, and I will take nothing from you." And with thanks on the Major's part, and good wishes for his safe arrival at his destination on Biddy's, they parted.

He walked briskly back to meet his carriage, hoping to see some trace of the mysterious lady. He, however, saw nobody. The driver, whom he questioned on

the subject, said that no one had passed that way since he left him.

They then set to work to mend the trace, which they soon had in repair, and were able to proceed on their way, arriving without further accident at the gate of Cairniebrow Park. It was too dark to be able to see anything, but the Major judged, from the time between their passing the lodge and stopping at the hall door, that the park must be of considerable extent.

The servant who opened the door looked extremely sleepy, but he answered in the affirmative to both the Major's questions—if Mr. Thornby were there? and if the driver might put up his gig in the stable, and have a bed in the house for the night? The poor lad looked very grateful for this permission; and having seen him safely in the charge of a groom who promised to look after him, Major Kempthorn sent up his card, and was asked to step into the dining-room, where in a few minutes Mr. Thornby made his appearance. He was an elderly, gentlemanly-looking man, with a bright, kind expression, and a particularly quiet manner. He greeted the Major like an old friend, and the latter, after an apology for arriving so late, inquired after Miss Berriton.

Mr. Thornby believed her pretty well; he had not seen her that day.

"She keeps her room then?"

"Principally," was the reply. "What refreshment would you like?"

"Anything that will give no trouble. I dined at York."

Mr. Thornby rang the bell, and desired that wine,

cold meat, etc. might be brought up. The two gentlemen then sat down by the fire—

"For there e'en summer's night is chill"—

and talked upon matters of business, until the clock, striking twelve, warned them that they had better retire.

Major Kempthorn requested the servant who attended him to his room to let Miss Berriton be informed of his arrival, and to ask her at what hour it would be most convenient to her for him to wait upon her the following day.

CHAPTER II.

"Mysteries abound at every step,
And more and more entangled grows the web."

BREAKFAST-TIME next morning brought no Miss Berriton, and all the answer that was returned to messages of inquiry was that she was tolerably well, and hoped Mr. Thornby would take care of the Major. The latter looked at the lawyer in perplexity, but Mr. Thornby only smiled.

"She will make her appearance when it is necessary," he said, "never fear; she is the quietest, most undemonstrative young lady I ever saw, and has a remarkably clear head for business too."

The Major shrugged his shoulders, as if this last quality was no advantage in his eyes. However, he had but little time to think about his ward, for all the morning they were occupied with business, and in seeing those people who necessarily called. Everything was very clear and simple. There were no relations to send to, no friends to invite; for the General had lived much retired, and except the clergyman of the parish, and the medical man who attended him, nobody seemed to have known him. All his affairs were straight and plain, Mr. Thornby speaking with admiration of his penetrating, upright mind, though at the same time he designated him as a little peculiar. He left everything

absolutely in Major Kempthorn's hands, to the extent that if Isabella married without his permission before she was five and twenty, she was to forfeit all her property except £500 a year, the rest, in that case, going to her guardian.

"Do you suppose Miss Berriton knows of this arrangement?" asked Kempthorn of the lawyer, as they sat together in the dining-room.

"Oh yes," was the reply; "she was present when the General drew up his will; indeed, I think he asked her advice as to some of the minor details."

There was a curious smile upon Major Kempthorn's face as he said, "Indeed! well, I am rather anxious to see her; she must be peculiar."

However, luncheon-time came, and no Miss Berriton. After the meal, havinga rranged everything that they could for the present, the lawyer proposed to show the Major part of the house.

The rooms were large and well furnished, though in rather an old-fashioned style. The best room was the library, which, fronting the south-west with deep-set oriel windows, had at once a massive and a light look.

The Major stepped to the window to admire the view, a most extensive one over the wide open moor.

"I wonder," he said, "there is so little park round such a house as this."

"All the moor belongs to the property," replied Mr. Thornby. "The General disliked trees. You will see that there are very few on any portion of the estate."

"I can understand that," said the Major, throwing back the half-closed shutter, and opening the

casement; "the wind comes wild and free over the moorland."

"You have some of the blood of the north countryman in you still," said Mr. Thornby, smiling. "Is it not a splendid collection of books?"

"Yes," answered Kempthorn, leaning out of the window. "What lovely hills! How I should like to scramble over them."

"There spoke the Herbert Kempthorn I knew long ago," said Mr. Thornby; "I had begun to fear you had quite sobered down."

The Major laughed, but checked his retort, with the fear that the merriment might jar upon Miss Berriton, whose apartments he had been informed were close at hand, and, indeed, as they were quitting the library they met in the passage an elderly person, whom he supposed to be the young lady's maid. Mr. Thornby addressed her, and inquired if Miss Berriton were well enough to see Major Kempthorn."

"Miss Berriton would be happy to attend upon Major Kempthorn in the evening," was the reply; "she was at present resting."

"I feel very much," whispered the Major to his friend when they had passed on, "as if I were called upon to attend a princess. I am sure I shall never venture to address anything like a direct command to her. Why, where are we going now?" as the lawyer pushed open a door, and he found himself in a long, low, oak-panelled room.

"Miss Berriton's sitting-room," replied the other.

"Are we not intruding?"

"Oh dear me, no," said Mr. Thornby; "no chance of

her coming here if she is resting; her bed-chamber is quite at the other end of the passage."

Major Kempthorn gazed round him with some curiosity, to gather what information he could concerning his ward's mind from the furniture and arrangements of her private apartment. There was a large book-case filled with volumes, many old and dry-looking; several fine pictures hung on the walls, and on an easel by the window there was an unfinished pen-and-ink drawing of a fir tree, showing both delicacy and boldness of touch. A volume of Waverley lay on the table, and the card for the days of the month showed the twelfth, ten days before, seeming as if she had not entered the room since; and indeed on that day, as Mr. Thornby informed the Major, the General had been seized with his fatal illness, unexpectedly, about five o'clock in the afternoon.

The Major looked round him with softened eye; he liked the idea of the girl springing up from her employment, not even stopping to dry her pen, which lay incrusted with ink on the edge of her easel, to attend the hasty summons to her uncle's sick-bed, better than that of the self-contained heiress whose character was portrayed in the letter he had received, and whose business faculties his friend so much admired. He did not speak again as they left the room and returned to the hall, where Mr. Thornby paused and said, "Now I have some letters which I must absolutely write; how will you occupy yourself in the mean time?"

"By taking a turn round the garden, I think. Dinner, you say, will be at six?"

"Yes; at least that is the hour mentioned by the cook, who appears to settle those matters."

"I hope," said the Major, "that Miss Berriton's convenience has been consulted? I would not do anything to disturb her. We could as well have dined early if it had been more suitable."

"You are as much a man of impulse as ever, Herbert," laughed Mr. Thornby. "A quarter of an hour ago you would hardly speak civilly of Miss Berriton, and now I believe you are anxious to go without your dinner from the fear of disobliging her. If such be the change wrought by being in her sitting-room, I really do not know what will be the effect of her presence; I tremble for your authority as guardian!"

"Do not you be sarcastic, Johnnie," said the Major, laughing, and going back to the old familiar title when they were boys together.

Mr. Thornby's smile ended in a sigh. As far as pecuniary matters went he had been as successful as his friend; but in other respects he was a disappointed man, and only a naturally sweet disposition prevented him from being a soured one.

"Heigh-ho!" he said, as he seated himself by the writing-table; "who would ever have dreamed of seeing Herbert Kempthorn a steady, practical man of business, so thoughtless as he used to be? I can hardly believe that he has a son at college: but if he is getting into middle life, where must I be? Going fast down the incline I fear: but I can work still, so away with melancholy."

He ran his fingers through his hair, a favourite trick

when he was in doubt or perplexity, and then applied himself vigorously to his writing.

In the mean time the Major found his way into the garden. It was large, and laid out in the old-fashioned, prim style. Many of the flower-beds were bare; in one or two a few plants had been bedded out, but there was an air about the whole as if the work had been suddenly interrupted by the illness and death of the owner. Passing by the flower garden, the Major took a glance at the kitchen gardens, at the end of which there were greenhouses; but what interested him most was a piece of ground laid out with high yew hedges crossing one another at right angles, and between which were laid gravel paths; the hedges were cut in the trimmest manner, forming impenetrable walls, and even to-day when the sun was shining brightly the walks looked gloomy.

"I wonder," thought the Major, "that a tree-hater like the General should have left these standing; I suppose it was out of respect to his ancestors; they truly look older than the Hall itself."

He turned down one of the paths, lit a cigar, musing as he paced on the strange contradictiousness of fate that had made him the sole representative and executor of the kinsman from whom his family had been estranged for so many years, and who, he would have thought, would scarcely have heard of his existence. Suddenly, from one of the paths crossing at right angles that where he was walking, he perceived a tall figure in black advancing swiftly towards him; she was carrying a large bunch of white flowers, and a second glance at the general air and style convinced him that it must

be Miss Berriton. He drew back a few paces, thinking, as perhaps she might not care to see him, thus to allow her space to pass unnoticed. But such was not her intention; she came straight up to him, and in a low, but unusually deep voice for a girl, she said, "Major Kempthorn, I believe?"

"Yes, my dear," he answered, kindly. "I am right in supposing that I speak to Miss Berriton?"

"Yes," she replied, "I am Isabella Berriton."

There was a short pause, during which the Major scanned his ward more attentively. She was tall, remarkably so, with masses of hair as black as jet, black eyebrows, and large, very dark grey eyes; her features were fine and regular, but her expression was haughty and severe, and though her position was both painful and embarrassing, there was no flush on the marble-like cheek, no tear to soften the glitter of her eye. The Major felt that it was incumbent upon him to speak the first, so laying his hand upon hers, he said, with a kind, fatherly tone such as he might have used to one of his own daughters, "Isabella, my dear, I hope we shall become good friends; I do indeed feel for you, and sympathize with you."

Miss Berriton's eye flashed, though she stood quite motionless, making no effort to throw off or accept his hand.

"Thank you," she said, in an icy cold tone; "I desire neither sympathy nor pity." Another pause, then she said, "I wait your orders, sir."

The Major could have shaken her, but restraining himself with the thought, "Poor thing, no doubt she is weary with watching, and overwhelmed with

grief," he only said, in if possible a gentler tone than before, "Well, my dear, I think you had better go and rest; you are looking very tired."

"I am about to do so," was the reply; "I only came out for these," raising her flowers.

"I will wait upon you this evening at whatever hour is most convenient to you," he continued. He could not help his tone being a little sarcastic.

She felt the sting, for the colour mounted in her cheek, and she said, "It is for me to wait upon Major Kempthorn, at whatever hour, and in whatever place, he may please to appoint. Will he do me the favour to inform me when he is ready to see me?"

"With pleasure," said the Major, bowing, and with difficulty restraining a smile.

She made him a deep sweeping courtesy and passed on. He stood looking after her until she had disappeared behind the hedge in the direction of the house; then, as he continued his way, he uttered this reflection half aloud: "Well, I suppose it is good for every one's patience to be tried, but it will be a blessing if I do not fall foul of that girl!"

Perhaps it was imprudent thus to give form to his thoughts in a strange place, surrounded as he was by high hedges, but certainly he did not expect such an answer as he received, uttered in a shrill voice close beside his elbow—

"If you do, it will be to your own hurt!"

He looked round, and perceived, standing about a yard from him, the same woman he had seen the evening before in old Biddy's cottage; the only difference being that to-day she wore a sad-coloured mantle,

which in some measure toned down the brilliance of her scarlet scarf. His first impression was, as yesterday, that she was drunk, and he began: "What do you want here?" His next gave rise to the words, "Has Miss Berriton——?"

"Done what?" said the other. "Seen me? No; nor is she likely so to do. No; I hate and despise her race too much for that. My business here to-day is not with Isabella Berriton, but with Herbert Kempthorn."

"And what is your business with me, madam?" asked the Major, passing over the somewhat familiar title.

"To say to you what I did not say yesterday," she replied. "I wished to be quite sure before I spoke; now I have no doubt that you are the executor of the man they called General Berriton, and I wish to tell you not to be too hard upon your ward, for she will not stand it."

"How is it, madam, that, hating the family as you professed to do just now, you should take such an interest in the welfare of Miss Berriton?"

"One may hate a family and yet be concerned about it," she replied; "but I tell thee that my reasons are nothing to thee, and thou hadst best not inquire. Thou thyself hast some Berriton blood in thy veins; I see it in the flush that mounts to thy cheek even while I speak. If thou and Isabella Berriton once come into collision, it will be like Greek meeting Greek, and I cannot answer for it that thine will be the victory."

The Major thought that this was probably true, but

he did not the less resent the impertinence, and, with difficulty restraining his displeasure, he said, "May I ask if you are acquainted with Miss Berriton?"

"I never saw her, and she knows not of my existence."

"You knew the late General?"

"Yes; I *knew him*."

"But you are not in the habit of visiting here?"

"I should think not!"

"Then, madam," said the Major, firmly, though still civilly, "you must be aware that it is unusual thus to intrude upon a house of mourning. You are trespassing; I therefore request you at once to leave these grounds, else I must and will take measures for having you removed."

"Threaten not!" she said, with the air of a queen addressing her slave; "it will fall upon your own head; but I have warned you; if you will rush madly on to destruction, I cannot help it."

"There are bounds to every man's patience," said the Major; "mine has been tried to the utmost. I beg you will immediately depart."

"At my own pleasure," was the reply. "I am a free agent."

"Have the goodness, at least, to inform me of your name and address," said the Major.

She laughed. At that moment something clawed at the Major's leg; he turned to free himself—it was the black kitten. He looked back—the lady was gone! in that instant of time she had disappeared; whither? The kitten gave one bound to the top of the hedge, from whence it spit at the Major, who, exceedingly

annoyed, hurried along to the next cross path, round the further corner of which he saw the lady vanish. How could she have got so far in such a moment? He followed; but to no purpose—she was gone!

His next object was to make his way back to the kitchen garden, where he had seen some men working; but it was not so easy to find his way out of the yew labyrinth, where every turn was alike, and it was some minutes before he got clear and saw the garden before him. He hurried to the labourers—two men digging—and, describing to them the person, requested that they would follow her, and see her safe off the grounds, and at the same time to warn the people at the lodge on no account to let her pass another time.

To his surprise the men hesitated; and after a moment's consultation the elder of them said, "If you please, sir, we bees willing to obey in everything that is reasonable, but we bain't agoin' to follow spworits."

"Spirits!" said the Major, indignantly; "do you mean to pretend that that woman was a spirit? She was as much flesh and blood as you or I."

"Maybe, sir! maybe!" said the man, shaking his head, and returning to his work. There was clearly nothing to be had from them, so Major Kempthorn went to the house in search of the lawyer.

Here he obtained but little help or explanation. Mr. Thornby indeed accounted for the ghost by saying that she was a poor madwoman living in the neighbourhood, who, being quite harmless, was allowed to wander about by herself, which she did in this queer garb, to the great terror of the simpler country folk.

"Mad!" said the indignant soldier; "she is not more mad than Miss Berriton is; her answers to me were fully as sensible and polite."

"Perhaps both are a little touched," said the man of law, smiling; "but have you seen Miss Berriton?"

The Major related his interview with his ward, at which Mr. Thornby laughed very heartily; but though Kempthorn, now that the thing was over, could see the humour of it, he was very far from being satisfied with the explanations he had received; and it was not until convinced by the testimony of more than one unimpeachable eye-witness that Miss Berriton had gone straight to the greenhouses for her flowers, and come straight back, without speaking to a soul except himself and the gardener, that he could divest himself of the idea that she had in some way something to do with his strange visitor, whose warning, nevertheless, he was much inclined to follow.

CHAPTER III.

"And think'st thou, Redmond, I can part
From this loved home with lightsome heart,
Leaving to wild neglect whate'er
Even from my infancy was dear?
. . . . . .
That hearth my sire was wont to grace,
Full soon may be a stranger's place."—'Rokeby.'

General Berriton's funeral took place on the Friday, with as much simplicity and quietness as possible, the Major, the lawyer, and Isabella being the only mourners.

On the Monday morning following, Mr. Thornby, going to look for the Major in the library, found that he was interrupting a conversation of an apparently not very agreeable kind. Miss Berriton was standing by the table, her face wearing a perfectly calm, impassive expression, while the Major was leaning against the chimney-piece, looking rather annoyed.

"I fear I disturb," said Mr. Thornby, pausing at the threshold.

"Oh no; pray come in," said Major Kempthorn, with the air of a man who escapes from embarrassment.

Mr. Thornby accordingly advanced and shook hands with Miss Berriton, hoping she was pretty well, etc.

"Now, Isabella," said the Major, "we will hear what Mr. Thornby says; perhaps you will put more confidence in him, he being an older acquaintance. Will you be so kind, Mr. Thornby, as to repeat to Miss Berriton what we were saying at breakfast about the arrangements it is necessary to make."

"You know, my dear Miss Berriton," began Mr. Thornby, "that it is utterly impossible for you to live here alone—you are much too young for that—and therefore——"

"And therefore Major Kempthorn's plan is," said Isabella, as if she were repeating a lesson, "that this place should be let for a certain number of years, and that I should live with him and form one of his family."

The Major, who thought that his words had fallen on unheeding ears, was a little taken aback at thus hearing his plan detailed with such extraordinary coolness; however, he said, "I did not know that you understood what I meant, my dear; but since you do, do you like the notion of such an arrangement?"

"If you wish it, that is enough," said Miss Berriton.

"Isabella," said the Major, a little impatiently, "you are not a child, to be sent hither and thither in a blind, unreasoning way; why can you not talk over a thing sensibly? Listen. I know a gentleman and his wife, a Mr. and Mrs. Laing, who are on the look-out for a house like this; they are quiet people, with no children; he is a great scholar; they would take the house as it was furnished, and keep up the greenhouses, etc. I know he would enjoy the library, which is very valuable. When I say that they would take the house as

it is, I do not, of course, mean anything you might wish to keep for yourself. No doubt there are many books and pictures that you would like to bring with you, and some that you might wish to have packed away. Mr. and Mrs. Laing, if they came, would have their own servants, so that this household must be dispersed. Naturally you would keep your own maid, and your own horses."

"Thank you," said Isabella, in the same measured, cold tone; "but I do not in the least wish to have horses; I have ridden very little, and that only to please—" her voice failed for the moment—"and that only to please General Berriton," she added, firmly. "As far as I am concerned, the horses may be sold, or let to Mr. Laing with the rest of the furniture."

The Major could not help laughing.

"I am afraid hiring horses in that way would be too great a risk," he said, "but we will see."

"And for the maid," continued Isabella, not noticing the interruption, "I need no one to wait upon me; I would rather be without one. My present maid would not have remained longer than Midsummer under any circumstances. When, sir, would you wish to leave this place?"

"When it is convenient to you."

"I can be ready to go to-morrow, if you desire it."

"No, no, not so soon as that," said Mr. Thornby; "it would be too great a wrench. There are some friends, doubtless, you would like to see before going."

"There is no one," said Miss Berriton, roused at length out of her calm, and speaking rapidly with

heaving breast. "I desire to see no one, and I only want to get away from here as soon as possible."

Her words ended in a sob.

The Major held out his hand with a kind, "poor child." She, however, paid no attention either to the gesture or the words, but stood rigidly, as if waiting for further orders.

The Major said, "Well, then, Mr. Thornby, we will talk the matter over, and see what is best to be done. You will trust to us, my dear, to settle what is best for you?" addressing Isabella.

"I will do whatever you wish," she said, and with a curtsey to each of the gentlemen, she quitted the room.

"Now, is she not enough to try the patience of a saint?" cried the Major, when the door had closed behind her.

"She evidently tries that of my friend Herbert Kempthorn," said Mr. Thornby, smiling; "but I think you ought to make great excuse and allowance for her."

"Every excuse, every allowance," answered the Major. "I would rather she were rebellious than so very virtuous and submissive; it puts me out of tune. But now to business. If all she says is correct, this must be a queer household."

The gentlemen, however, found on investigation that Miss Berriton had told the truth. The maid was to leave at Midsummer to be married, and there had been no attempt, at present, to supply her place. The General for some months had not ridden, and there had been some talk of selling the horses; and, to conclude,

living very much retired, they knew no one, Isabella had no friends. Under these circumstances, therefore, they determined to dismiss the household, and to sell the horses.

The arrangements with Mr. Laing were soon made; his servants were to come on June 20, until which date, after the departure of the Major and Miss Berriton, the steward was to have care of the house.

As a matter of course, the Major consulted with Isabella on all these plans, and endeavoured to make her give her opinion, but not with much success, as she agreed coldly with everything he said or did, until at last he came to believe that Mr. Thornby's estimate of her good business qualities was founded upon her giving unlimited assent to all he proposed.

On one occasion only she gave an independent opinion, and that was in the case of a cottage tenant, very badly off, to whom the General had at the two previous quarters remitted the rent. Isabella, however, pointed out that the man was in full work, that several of his children were earning something, and that he was therefore quite able to pay the money.

"My dear!" exclaimed the Major, horrified; "what a thing for a young lady to think of. You would not be so very grasping, surely?"

"It is only because it is right," said Isabella. "I do not care about the money, that might easily be returned to them afterwards, but it is the wasteful habits it trains them in, if they think they are certain to be let off the rent."

This calm, judicial way of reasoning did not improve the Major's opinion of her; and she, on her part, was

so much offended at the rebuke he had given her that she did not open her lips for the rest of the evening. About the things she was to take with her she was equally strange; usually she showed a perfect indifference, and it was only here and there that she put aside something to be packed away. There were very few of the pictures even in her own rooms that she cared to have with her; and as for the books, she positively refused to have anything to do with any but those in her own private collection, declaring that there was not one that she valued more than another, and that Mr. Laing was quite welcome to the use of the whole. Thus when, about the end of the first week in June, the Major started on his homeward journey, he felt very much as if he were bringing with him some sort of wild animal of doubtful temper. She showed no sign of grief at parting; the wild breeze over the moor waved her crape, but she sat with rigid features and undimmed eye. When they got into the railway train she drew down her veil, and settling herself in one corner, sat perfectly still and silent for many hours.

Her companion became alarmed, and began to wish he had delayed his journey till the morrow, when his wife would have been at home to receive them, whereas now she would only arrive with Alice Montague at the same time, perhaps not even till after they did.

"All well at home?" asked the Major of the servant who was at the station to meet them.

"Quite, sir, thank you."

He helped Isabella out, and took a hasty glance at a note which had been handed to him; then, looking round for his charge, he perceived her walking

deliberately down the station. Hurrying after her—"My dear, where are you going?" he said,

"To look after the luggage."

"The servant and I will do that, my dear."

"Oh," said Isabella, with her exasperating meekness; "I thought I ought to save you trouble in everything I could."

The Major could not forbear a little bit of sarcasm. "In this part of the country," he said, "it is not customary for young ladies, when they have gentlemen with them, and servants to meet them, to see after their own things. If you will kindly take a seat on that bench, I will find the luggage, and you can watch it put on the truck, to be quite sure that I make no mistake."

She coloured deeply, but obeyed him; and when, a minute later, the footman offered to show her to the carriage, she followed without a word.

As they were driving along the lanes, the Major remarked on the beauty of the hawthorn, now in full bloom everywhere, and filling the air with its scent.

"Yes," said Isabella; "and look at the chestnuts too," as they were passing a gentleman's house; "I wonder they are still out, as it has been such an early spring."

"I did not see any chestnuts about Cairniebrow," he said.

"No," she replied, "we have not any; but I have read accounts of the spring."

"Do you study the newspapers much?"

"Yes; a good deal."

It was on the tip of his tongue to ask if she would

not like to converse upon political economy, but, as ridicule seemed to produce more effect upon her than anything else, he resolved to reserve it for greater occasions.

"Is that your home?" she asked as they turned in at the gates.

"It is my house and grounds," he answered; "but we do not live much here; we are generally with my regiment. You know I am only away on sick leave; I join again in August."

She did not answer, but looked at the pretty park-like field, and at the shrubs and flowers which bordered the drive, with more interest than the major had yet seen upon her face; but she grew rigid again when they stopped at the hall-door, where Herbert, a pleasant, gentlemanly-looking youth, was waiting for his father.

"Well, how are you?" said the Major, springing out and shaking hands with him, "has your mother yet come back?" But, scarcely waiting for Herbert's answer, "No; but we expect her in about a quarter of an hour," he drew Isabella's arm through his own, and led her to the drawing-room, where his daughters were assembled.

"I have brought you a new friend, my dears," he said. "Here are all that are at home, Isabella: Grace, Florence, Ada, and little Amy."

They shook hands with Miss Berriton quietly and stiffly. Grace, the eldest, was just turned eighteen; there was about a year between her and her next sister, Florence; and as much between Florence and Ada, while Amy was quite a child, the intermediate brothers and sisters being at school. They were bright,

pretty, intelligent-looking girls; all in slight mourning of grey trimmed with black.

There was rather an awkward pause, no one exactly knowing what to say or do next, to break which the Major asked Grace when she expected her mother.

"Almost directly," she answered; "they were to arrive a quarter of an hour after you did."

"That is right," said the Major. While he was putting a few inquiries to Grace as to how they had sped during his absence, Florence spoke to Isabella, with a free and rather flippant manner:

"What a lovely day you have had for travelling."

"Beautiful."

"Would you not like to take off your bonnet, you must be so very warm?"

Isabella did so, but gave the speaker such a look out of her deep dark eyes, so like a savage animal roused from its lair, that Florence, positively frightened, drew back a few paces. To a man with a keen sense of the ridiculous like Major Kempthorn, the whole scene presented a most comical side: Grace, with her nervousness at acting deputy-lady of the house without knowing what to propose; Florence looking startled and confounded; Miss Berriton sitting bolt upright in her chair, looking repression itself; and the background formed by Ada in a low wicker chair, reading, and Herbert pulling a flower to pieces by the window. He felt that he must laugh when, to his relief, the door-bell rang; but he had only reached the drawing-room door when he met a tall girl in deep mourning, but with a fashionable hat stuck on the back of her head, who advanced towards him, saying,

"Dear uncle Herbert, it is so long since I saw you."

"Welcome, Alice," he said, warmly embracing her; "here are some friends longing to make your acquaintance."

"Oh yes; I know you all by description," she said, kissing the girls by turns with a frankness and brightness that was most engaging. She looked as if she would have done the same by Isabella, but here was something too coldly repelling even for her, and she contented herself with shaking hands, while Mrs. Kempthorn, disengaging herself from husband and children, came into the room saying, "Where is she? where is Isabella?"

"Here!" said the Major, his confidence in his wife making him feel that all would mend now.

Mrs. Kempthorn threw her arm round the girl, kissing her affectionately. For the moment there was a slight flush on Isabella's cheek, and she responded sufficiently to confirm the good lady's opinion that she had been chilled, and only needed melting to bring her out.

In the mean time the Major was saying to Alice,

"Take that thing off, Alice, and let me look at you."

She obeyed laughing, throwing her hat down upon the sofa. She was between eighteen and nineteen, with bright sparkling blue eyes, and beautiful, fair, glossy hair, eyebrows of a darker shade, nice features, and a glowing complexion. She was the fairest type of woman the Major had seen for a long time, and as he took both her hands and looked down into her

face, he said with a sigh, "You are very like your mother, Alice, as I knew her when first she was married."

"Yes; Mrs. Boston always said I was like her," answered Alice with a momentary softening; and Mrs. Kempthorn was saying,

"Come, girls, can you not show your visitors to their rooms? I want this poor child to rest; she looks tired to death."

"Why, Barnes, what have you there?" exclaimed the Major, as the servant entered carrying something which Grace greeted with: "Oh, you darling kitten! let me take it, Barnes."

But as she grasped it, the "darling kitten" only mewed and scratched.

"Where did it come from, Barnes?" asked the Major.

"You brought it with you, sir; it was in your coat-pocket."

"Is it yours, Isabella?" asked the Major, turning to his ward, "rather a dangerous way to choose for it to travel; it might have been lost, or I might have sat upon it, not knowing anything about it."

"It is yours," said Isabella.

"Mine?" cried the soldier, mystified.

"At least you brought it with you to Cairniebrow," continued Miss Berriton. "I do not like cats; and there never was a black one in the house that I remember. But this came with you; it was seen asleep upon your bed, and Mr. Thornby supposed that it was yours; he said you used to be very fond of animals."

The ludicrousness of the whole thing was too strong for the Major, and he burst into a merry peal of laughter. "Poor child," he thought, "no wonder she behaved queerly; she must have imagined she had a cracked-fellow for a guardian. I beg your pardon, my dear," he said aloud; "I assure you I know nothing about the creature."

"Where can it have come from then?" said Miss Berriton, half offended, "the very day after you arrived, when I saw you in the yew walks, it was running after you, and that evening the housemaid told me of its being on your bed."

At this moment the kitten, having released itself from Grace by dint of scratching and mewing, rushed across the table to the Major, and confirmed his claim to its ownership by rubbing itself against him and purring. He then saw that it was jet black, the very self-same kitten that had accompanied his strange acquaintance at old Biddy's cottage.

"It must belong to that mad woman," he exclaimed.

"Why, papa! have you been staying with a mad woman," cried Grace.

"There are no mad people at Cairniebrow Hall," said Isabella angrily.

"Hush!" said the Major, displeased at the want of taste in his daughter's remark; "but how came it in my pocket, my dear."

"I put it there," replied Isabella; "it was scrambling about your coat before we started this morning, and Mr. Thornby told me do so, that it might not be forgotten; and as you put your hand in, and felt it, and said nothing about it, I supposed it was all right."

"I am not surprised," said the Major, laughing again, "that you thought it necessary to look after me at the station, you must imagine that I am not in full possession of my senses."

She looked at him perplexed; Mrs. Kempthorn interposed: "How long before dinner, Grace?"

"About half-an-hour," she answered.

"Very well then; take Alice to her room, and you come with me, my dear; I am sure you must want a cup of tea."

She led the way upstairs to a large airy bed-room.

"Here is your bed-chamber, and here," opening the door into a tolerably-sized dressing-closet, which had been fitted up as a sitting-room, "is a little den where you can put your books, and sit whenever you are tired of the noise; I know that, having been the only one, you will find our large numbers rather oppressive at times. Do not change your dress, I will be back with you before very long."

On re-entering the drawing-room under Mrs. Kempthorn's wing just as the dinner-bell rang, Isabella at once felt conscious of the contrast between herself and the other girls. Her dress was merely a plain black morning gown, much trimmed with crape, while the Miss Kempthorns were in white muslins and black ribbons, and even Alice Montague had on a silk dress, handsomely and fashionably made. She was standing by the table talking merrily, principally to Herbert, though at the same time she kept the sisters joining in the conversation. Perhaps her manner was a trifle too lively, for the Major, on entering, said to his wife,

"She does not seem as if the death of Mrs. Boston had depressed her much."

"I am only too glad to hear her laugh again," said Mrs. Kempthorn. "I am sure she has been very unhappy."

"She has soon shaken off her sorrow then," muttered the Major, as he looked at the sparkling eye and glowing cheek. He gave Isabella his arm to conduct her to the dining-room, where she sat silent and abstracted all through the meal, scarcely eating anything, though disclaiming all notion of fatigue or headache. The Major suddenly remembered that he had never yet dined or breakfasted in her company. He began to wonder whether it were one of her peculiarities always to eat in private—his wife must find out. Alice, in the mean time, a great contrast to her fellow-ward, was talking lightly and airily, with a good deal of brilliancy and at times a touch of keen humour, though it must be confessed the whole tone was a little giddy—the Major thought so, for once or twice he frowned as if displeased.

When they were sitting in the drawing-room in the twilight after dinner, however, Alice took a more serious turn. Her arm round Grace in the deep bay-window, she spoke of her old home, of Mrs. Boston, whom it appeared she had loved like a mother, and how she was quite certain it would be long before she could love another place as well as she had done the old house at ——

Isabella sat, gravely repelling all Ada's attempts to make friends with her, until the entrance of Herbert and lights made Alice spring up and begin to talk with

her former merriment, when she rose, saying quietly to Mrs. Kempthorn, "I should like to go to my room for a little while, please."

"Very well, my dear," answered the lady, "do not worry yourself with unpacking to-night. If there is anything you particularly want the maid will help you. Would you like Florence to come with you?"

"No, thank you; I would rather be alone."

She left the room, and the others, as if relieved by her absence, talked even more merrily than before.

"Where is Isabella?" asked the Major, when about half-an-hour later he came in to tea.

"Gone upstairs," answered Mrs. Kempthorn; "I am going to her now to see if she would not like to go to bed, she was looking so very tired."

The Major followed her out of the room. "My dear," he said, "can you not find some way of stopping Alice's chatter? she has done nothing else ever since she came into the house."

"Better leave her alone for this evening," answered his wife, "I think it is only the reaction coming among young people, after being so long in a sick house."

"I hope that is the case then," said the Major, and he returned to the drawing-room, where he presently procured a temporary lull by desiring Grace to give them some music.

Mrs. Kempthorn found Isabella sitting by the window, doing nothing. She did not seem to have been crying, but there was a look of suffering on her face that went straight to Mrs. Kempthorn's heart.

"Would you not like to go to bed directly?" she asked kindly.

"I think I should," she replied, beginning to unfasten her dress.

Mrs. Kempthorn aided her, and presently, when she was in bed, declining anything to eat or drink, before putting out the light, she kissed her, as perhaps Isabella had never been kissed before. The girl responded to it, and as the head with its heavy masses of black hair fell back upon the pillow there was a sound of a stifled, strangling sob; and as Mrs. Kempthorn closed the door, her heart was warm with affection for this lovely desolate being.

CHAPTER IV.

"Two people more different there could not be—
The one, all smiles and fun and life; the other, gloomy and grave."

ALICE MONTAGUE was the only daughter of Major Kempthorn's greatest friend. Charles Montague had been to him like a brother; together they had passed through school and college, always taking near about the same place, for if Charles had the best abilities, Herbert was the most persevering; together they entered the army, and they might almost be said to have fallen in love at the same time, though Herbert was married rather sooner than Charles. When Captain Montague died he left the care of his widow and child to Herbert Kempthorn and Mrs. Boston, a distant relation of Mrs. Montague, with whom she made her home. Never being much more than a petted, loving child herself, she died when Alice was about eight years old, and Mr. and Mrs. Boston had kept her little girl; and even after her husband's death, which happened two years later than that of Mrs. Montague, Mrs. Boston, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, begged to be allowed to keep the child she had loved with a mother's affection.

Alice herself had been well educated, was very bright-tempered, gay, fond of society, and with a desire to rule; but she was a benevolent princess, and if she

did strive to be first and to lead her companions, it was only for their good, that she might preserve harmony, and secure to each, as far as possible, what he or she liked. Clever, with a good voice and taste for music, with winning manners, and a large fortune, it was to be expected that she would obtain all the homage for which she wished; and it was, therefore, as well for her that she had thus become a member of a large wealthy family, where, of course, one must yield to another.

In all these qualities Isabella Berriton was exactly her opposite. Brought up in complete seclusion, she possessed no accomplishments—could neither play nor sing. She had read a great deal, but principally of a deep, severe character. Her uncle, while carefully training her mind, had impressed upon her his own prejudices and principles, which were those of an ultra-Tory of the old school. She stood as the representative of a now almost obsolete, haughty, exclusive aristocracy. Intensely proud of her family, but with a contempt for riches merely as such, she was most severely just in her notions, so as sometimes even to be hard. Thoroughly upright, she regarded every one that deviated in the slightest degree from the truth as almost hopelessly depraved; courageous, even to foolhardiness, she was nevertheless strictly obedient, but her uncle's discipline had been rather that of the martinet than of the relative. He had set Major Kempthorn over her, whose slightest command was therefore to be attended to.

It will, perhaps, be seen that there was in Isabella the mouldings of a finer character than Alice's; but,

for the present at least, she was sure not to be so much liked, and the difference between them had been shown at once; so that the young Kempthorns, discussing the new arrivals in their bedrooms that same evening, could not find sufficient to say in praise of Alice, while "that proud, disagreeable Miss Berriton" was the mildest epithet they gave to their other guest.

Major Kempthorn had been accustomed all his life to very early habits, and he had trained his children in the same. The girls knew that whatever dissipation they had had, however late they had been the evening before, they were not allowed to dawdle in after breakfast had began, and Grace was usually down the first, to make the tea, and to fulfil any other little offices that might be necessary. She was thus engaged the morning after the return of her parents, a few minutes before eight, when her father entered the room. After greeting her, he asked if she had seen anything of their visitors.

"No," she answered; "but Florence has gone to help Alice."

"You must not neglect Miss Berriton," said the Major, with a shade of reproof in his tone.

"Oh no," she replied; "but is she not disagreeable, papa? and so queer, too. Nurse said she was up and drest when she went to call her; I am sure I shall never like her."

"Beware of forming hasty judgments," said the Major, and at that moment, the subject of their conversation, Isabella, herself entered the room; she looked pale, as if she had not slept well, though she declared herself perfectly rested. After speaking to her the

Major retreated to the window with his letters, thinking that the two girls would soonest make friends if left to themselves.

"Where is Alice?" said the Major when they were seated round the table.

"She is not quite ready yet, but she will be done directly."

"I suppose we must excuse her, being the first morning," said the Major; "but I hope she will soon get into regular, punctual habits."

Mrs. Kempthorn did not think this either the time or place to observe, that although she had lived with Alice for more than a fortnight she had never yet known her once to be ready at the time. Breakfast was nearly half over when Miss Montague sauntered into the room, looking very bright and beautiful. She did not apparently notice the irony in her guardian's tone as he kissed her: "I am glad, my dear, to see that you look none the worse for being obliged to get up so early," for she answered:

"Oh no! thank you, uncle; I have always been used to breakfast at eight."

She took the chair left for her exactly opposite to Isabella; presently, her cup and plate having been supplied, she attacked Herbert with, "Why, Herbert, are you not at college? term cannot be over yet."

"No," he answered; "but I have not been back at all since Easter, not having been allowed to read."

"What a pity!" she said. "I hope you are quite well now?"

"Oh yes, thank you," he said; "I am pretty well now, but I am still obliged to take care."

A moment's pause, then Alice remarked: "Do you ride, girls?"

"Yes," they answered, amused at the way the question was put.

"Do you ride, Miss Berriton?" asked Alice next of her opposite neighbour.

"Not much, and I do not care for it," she replied coldly.

"Come, Alice, get on with your breakfast," said Mrs. Kempthorn, seeing her husband looking annoyed.

Thus admonished, Alice said no more until the meal was concluded and they had risen from the table, when she proposed a turn round the garden and park. The others eagerly agreed; the Major merely warning his son not to remain out after the day grew hot. Miss Berriton was invited to be one of the party, but she declined, saying she wished to arrange her things.

"Oh, never mind them," said Grace; "nurse and Susan will do your unpacking for you."

"I certainly would not trouble myself, Miss Berriton, if I had any one to do it for me," said Alice.

"Thank you," said Isabella haughtily; "but when I can do a thing for myself I prefer to do it."

She passed on her way, and we fear Florence found no one to contradict her when she pronounced, in no measured terms, that "that Miss Berriton was a horrid girl."

"Where is Isabella?" asked the Major at luncheon, as her place was empty.

"I do not know," said Grace, "I have not seen her since breakfast."

"Has no one been to her all the morning?" said the Major, "that ought not to be."

"Go and see if she is in her room, Amy," interposed Mrs. Kempthorn, "perhaps she did not hear the bell."

The child obeyed; Miss Berriton's bedroom was empty, and the study door was shut; she knocked, it was at once opened, and Isabella presented herself.

"What is it?" she said.

"Mamma sent me up to tell you that luncheon is ready, Miss Berriton," said Amy.

"Thank you," said Isabella with a momentary softening of manner. But she grew stiff again as they entered the dining-room, and she apologized for being late.

"Never mind, dear," said Mrs. Kempthorn, pleasantly. "You do not understand the bells yet; one of the girls ought to have come to fetch you."

By way of stopping Alice from chattering the Major endeavoured to get up a conversation with Isabella; not, however, with much success, for though she answered all his questions, she spoke as shortly and as much to the point as possible, as if she were under a cross-examination, and perhaps he was not sorry to be called away by some one wishing to see him on business.

"My dear," said Mrs. Kempthorn, laying her hand on Isabella's shoulder as they were leaving the dining-room, "do not sit over your books all the afternoon, you need some air and exercise."

"I would rather not go out until it gets cooler, if you do not mind," she answered.

"That is what I meant," said Mrs. Kempthorn; she might have added something more, but Alice called for

her attention to know the name of a rose that was climbing round the door, and in the interval Isabella had made her escape.

"Herbert dear," said Mrs. Kempthorn to her husband as he came into the drawing-room for a cup of tea, "do you think I had better insist upon Isabella coming down-stairs, she has been shut up in her room ever since luncheon; Grace went to the door once, but she refused to open it, saying she would rather remain where she was unless I wished her to come, and I really did not like to make it a matter of authority; she will not have any tea, I sent Florence to offer her some."

"I will go and have a talk with her," said the Major; "we are older friends, so perhaps we shall get on better."

"I wonder whether it is hauteur or shyness," continued his lady; "sometimes I am inclined to think it one, sometimes the other; to all appearances Alice is the most amiable of the two."

"Certainly," said the Major, looking towards the lawn where the young people were playing at croquet, in the fast lengthening shadows, while Alice's peculiarly light musical laugh rang through the open window. "Well," he added, taking up his cup, "I will go and see what I can do with her; I have a sort of fellow-feeling for her, being always rather inclined to snap at strangers myself."

Major Kempthorn went to Isabella's room and tapped at the door, saying in answer to her not very encouraging "Who is there? What do you want?"

"It is I, Isabella; I have come to pay you a visit."

She opened immediately and he entered. It was only a small room, but being at the corner of the house it had the advantage of two windows with different aspects. The book-shelf was about half filled, while a box still packed stood against the wall. She placed him a chair, which he took, saying, "You see I have brought my tea with me; shall I fetch you a cup?"

"Oh no! thank you."

"Dinner will not be till 7·30."

"Another dinner!" said Isabella.

"Why yes, the other was only lunch; but perhaps you are accustomed to dine early, would you like to do so still?" said the Major, thinking that most likely this was the offence, and congratulating himself on getting out of the difficulty by so easy a concession; but her answer disconcerted him.

"I am not accustomed to dine at any time."

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Why I never troubled to sit down to a regular meal; I used to have my breakfast at seven; my dinner sometimes at noon, sometimes later."

"That in an old soldier's house," muttered the Major. "At what time did your uncle dine, my dear?"

"General Berriton," said Isabella, as if scorning the more familiar title, "did as I did. He said it was a sin to waste so much time over eating and drinking, when simple things are all that are necessary to keep us in health and strength; life is too short to learn all that one wishes without voluntarily wasting so many precious hours, and he had his plate of bread and meat and glass of water brought to him, and used to eat while still reading or making notes."

"Did you spend all your day in study?"

"Oh no! that would be ruining the health we have been given; we used to take long walks, then was his time for meditation."

"Well," said the Major, thinking that he had never heard of a more disagreeable and uncomfortable way of living, "if you find our meals too long, you can always have your luncheon in your own room, and you can leave the breakfast table when you have finished; I shall be obliged to do so when I rejoin the regiment, so that you can do the same."

"And make Miss Montague laugh at me; no," said Isabella bitterly.

"What do you mean?" said the Major astonished; "Alice would not do anything so unkind."

"Yes, she would; she despises me."

"How can you say so? you have not exchanged half-a-dozen words with her."

"But I know it; I hear it in every tone, and I hate her," cried Isabella vehemently.

"Isabella!" said the Major sharply, "if you talk and think in this wild, ungoverned way, you certainly will never be happy anywhere, or be able to live with anyone."

She was subdued directly.

"I beg your pardon," she said; "I should not have spoken so to you."

"You should not encourage such thoughts."

A pause; then he said,

"Isabella, when will you understand that Mrs. Kempthorn and I are your best friends, and only wish to make you happy?"

"I do understand it," she replied.

"Come!" said her guardian somewhat impatiently, "we shall only do harm by prolonging this discussion; get your hat and come for a turn, you have been sitting too long over your books."

She obeyed, but her manner was rather as if she felt herself a prisoner. Mrs. Kempthorn was on the lawn, and she came to meet them, saying,

"I am glad to see you out, my dear, you must be so tired of reading."

But Isabella made no response.

"I suppose, Miss Berriton, *you* do not play croquet?" said Alice, and to the Major's awakened ear it appeared as if there *was* a little malice in her tone, and he answered rather quickly, "Isabella is like me, Alice, she prefers walking to dawdling about."

Alice pouted a little at this unexpected rebuff, and Florence ventured to mutter to her sister, "I suppose she will be papa's favourite now!"

"Florence!" said the Major angrily. "We will walk along the terrace, Isabella."

She accompanied him without a word, and they pursued their way in gloomy silence along the high raised path, until they came to where a number of steps descended to a large fernery, beside which a tiny stream fell over some rocks, and then flowed at the bottom of the garden.

"We will go down here," said the Major, "I want to see the fernery." But, catching sight of the gardener, he stepped aside to speak to him, and at the same moment Amy, whom Mrs. Kempthorn sent after them, ran up, and her father called to her to take Miss Berriton

to the fernery. When they reached it Amy ran away, but the Major had not yet finished his conversation when she returned, carrying a large rose, which she offered to Isabella. Miss Berriton took it, and as she kissed and thanked the little donor, she smiled a sudden sweet smile, which, softening and illuminating her usually stern handsome features, rendered them inexpressively attractive.

"There is something in her after all," thought the Major, but the moment she saw he was watching her she drew herself up and bent her brows; she, however, listened with exemplary patience to a long discussion which he gave her on the merits and qualities of the different ferns, though he was not at all certain if it arose from her usual submissiveness, or that she regarded it as a sort of punishment for her burst of passion.

This day is only a specimen, and a very mild specimen, of what the Kempthorns had to bear with Isabella Berriton; it is not too much to say that she made herself an extremely disagreeable inmate of Fernleigh. Liking nothing that was done, she cared neither for riding, driving, boating, nor sauntering in the garden, took an interest in nothing, could not play nor sing, would not draw. It is, however, some excuse for her, that, educated in a peculiar manner, she had no pursuits or tastes that were likely to make her an agreeable companion; her very knowledge only removed her further from those she was with. What could it avail her, for instance, to have studied old French literature, and to be an adept in the ancient Provençal tongue, if she could not sustain ten minutes' conversation in modern

French? and the girls cared very little for her geographical knowledge, however deep and correct, when they found that she did not know where the prison of Chillon was; and they pronounced her taste horrible when, on being informed and having the poem read to her, she declared it mere rubbish. Although capable of deep and sincere friendships she did not make acquaintance easily, and she stood aloof from the young Kempthorns, who soon gave up the attempt to cultivate her, while between Alice and herself there reigned a perpetual though smothered feud.

Isabella was strictly accurate, but Alice was hasty and apt to speak without thinking. Isabella caught up every one of her little mistakes as if they had been intentional falsehoods, until Alice came to dislike her, as much as it lay in her light nature to dislike anyone. It was impossible for her to hate as Isabella did; she at first used to laugh at her oddities and eccentricities, but a few angry looks soon cured her as they had done the young Kempthorns; she contented herself with avoiding her, but she never lost an opportunity of having a sly cut at her.

The only person with whom Miss Berriton was on really comfortable terms was Amy; the child liked her, and the confidence shown thus had its effect upon Isabella's generous nature. Amy was never repulsed; she followed her everywhere, was never so happy as when allowed to sit with her, and however busy Isabella might be she never refused to admit Amy to her study, though she would have no one else there, and guarded her treasures with a jealous care. The person she got on next best with was the Major; his keen sarcasms

went home; she stood in awe of him, and therefore respected and liked him. When he met her in her long, lonely walks he always joined her, and enjoyed making her talk. One or two little things she let fall made him suspect that she was a keen politician, but any attempt to probe her opinions always made her take refuge in her submissive silence. She said she was quite happy, though her sad expression rather belied her words; but when the Major offered her to go and stay with some of her friends for a while, thinking that being with those she knew might cheer her up and do her good, she said she had no one to go to, and with something like a sob entreated not to be sent away from them; so there was nothing for it but wait for time and its healing influence.

CHAPTER V.

" The Sibyl sat and slowly spun,
As she told her tale of woe—
How when the hour-glass had run,
The brave Sir Guy was dead.
But still his spirit haunts this land,
And still, in the moment of death,
Those of his race behold him nigh
To aid the parting breath."

It was a burning hot afternoon of July that a young gentleman was walking along the esplanade of the little sea-town of B——. He had an open letter in his hand, and was apparently endeavouring to find some particular address, for he looked first at his letter, then at the little row of houses which faced the sea; then shook his head impatiently, as if at not seeing what he wanted. He spoke to a man who was leaning over the low sea-wall which separated the beach from the terrace.

" Can you tell me which is Broughton Lodge, where Miss Ruth Wybeer is living?"

" I know of no such name here," answered the man, a good-tempered, honest-faced, but somewhat dull-looking fisherman; " but that is Broughton Lodge, the first house you see after passing the terrace."

" Thank you," said the young man, and he walked on briskly. On knocking at the door it was opened

by a repulsive, down-looking servant, who answered his inquiries as to whether Miss Wybeer were at home by asking him to walk in. He was beginning, "Will you tell your mistress that ——" but the servant interrupted him rather rudely—"I know; walk in there, please."

He closed the door, and the young man found himself in a small room, the blinds of which were pulled down though for some hours the sun had ceased to shine on this side of the house. The visitor went to the window and endeavoured to get a little light, however without success, for the venetian blinds were heavy and the cord appeared to be broken, and he only succeeded on turning one lath, through which crack a gleam fell upon a picture hanging exactly opposite, which immediately attracted his attention. It was a portrait of a young lady in a white worked muslin dress, cut very low, in the fashion of some fifty or sixty years before. Her thick black hair was coiled closely round her head, and in it she had a single red rose; crossways over her breast she wore a broad scarlet ribbon, fastened on her right shoulder with a diamond clasp. Every feature of the face was perfect, the whole strikingly handsome, but unattractive, owing to a scornful expression on the lips, almost terrifying from a certain wild, revengeful gleam in the eyes. It was a face that might be admired in a chieftainess of banditti, scarcely one that you would care to meet in every-day life.

The young man was endeavouring to make the most of the tantalising gleam to discover if possible the name of the lady, or at least that of the painter, when a voice

beside him exclaimed, "So you have found your fate, Maximilian?"

He started round and perceived the speaker, a slight bending figure, with a black shawl over her shoulders, and a black silk handkerchief folded over her cap. Seeing it was the person he had come to visit, he answered, "You see, aunt, I have obeyed you literally, and have come at once; now let me hope that you will put an end to all mystery, and tell me everything; it is time, I assure you."

"I will not," answered the lady, for such, according to all that would be seen of her in the dim light, she appeared to be.

"I think I deserve more confidence," said the young man. "I have done this, left undone that, to please you; you have hitherto refused to see me, and now, when at last you expressed a desire for a personal interview, I came at considerable inconvenience, only because, as you know well, my father taught me that, though distantly, you are connected with us" ("or you with me," put in the lady), "and therefore to be treated with consideration."

"That was one of the few wise things he did, in the course of his long and useless life," said his relation.

"Madam," said the young man hotly, "Colonel Thesiger was a brave and honourable man, esteemed by his country, which he served to the best of his ability."

"Tut, tut, Maximilian," answered the old lady; "I knew your father before you were born, and am well acquainted with all his foibles. But it is to your real advantage to obey me in *everything*."

The emphasis she laid on this last word caused him to say, "In what is just and honourable, madam. The air of mystery in which you have involved everything concerning yourself has naturally made me suspicious, and though, orphan as I am, with neither brother nor sister, I am but too glad to acknowledge the ties of kindred wherever I find them, still I assure you that no feelings of interest shall prompt me to do that of which my conscience disapproves, even to please you, my only relative."

"Little enough you would gain by such a course," said the lady; "but before quarrelling further let us proceed to business. To return to what I began with, You have found you fate—in that portrait!" As he looked at her, and then at it, Maximilian could not help laughing.

"My dear aunt," he said, "I cannot think what you mean. That lady is in the costume worn by my great-grandmother, and how she can be my fate—— Unless indeed," he added, struck by a certain resemblance between the lady's eyes and those that were peering up into his face, for Miss Wybeer had seated herself, and was therefore considerably below him, "unless indeed, aunt, it is a likeness of you, taken many years ago; but that lady wears a wedding ring, so that cannot be."

"You may jeer if you like, Maximilian, but you cannot help yourself," said his aunt. "We are on the eve of a great crisis. Great wrong was done by those who preceded us, and by an inviolable law of nature the hour of retribution, though long delayed, has come at last. The guilty are in their graves, but

those who share their blood share their crime. Justice must be done; it will either be for great weal or great woe. The actors are carried forward by a blind, irresistible force; they cannot escape their destiny. Did you ever hear this, Maximilian:

'There is justice under heaven;
To us it shall be given
When all our foes are gone'?"

"Oh yes," answered the young man readily; "but there was another line, beginning with 'beware,' and ending with some name to rhyme with 'gone,' the last syllable was, I think, 'ton'—how stupid I cannot recollect it. My father used to say that there was an old legend and prophecy attached to it."

"And it is to tell you that legend that I sent for you here," said Miss Wybeer; "but you must sit down, I cannot speak while you stand between me and the light. No; I do not want the blind up. You need not stare at that picture, it will not come to life; but you are doomed, and that is enough for you."

"To marry my great-grandmother," murmured Maximilian, as he obeyed her injunction and took a chair. His aunt paid no attention, perhaps did not hear this remark; but having arranged her silk handkerchief so as entirely to conceal her face, began:

"During the great Rebellion, a certain Mr. Richard Wybeer was living at his estate of Coon Hall; he was a Roundhead, but more of an honest man than the generality of such accursed rebels. He had one only daughter, Mabel, who was renowned all the country through for her beauty, from which she was called the Rose of Coon. A young cavalier gentleman, Mr. Ralph

——, no; I will not tell you his surname, but simply call him Ralph, whom her father had befriended in time of trouble, won the heart of fair Mabel, and they were married; but Ralph had neglected to consult one most important person, his own father, who, though his son was of full age, yet claimed authority over him. He was deeply enraged that the blood of a rebel should be mingled with his, unstained in his loyalty. He desired Ralph to give up his wife, and when the young man refused to do it, he drove him from his roof; but time wore on, and a fair boy was born to the young couple. The old man had no other descendant, he desired to be reconciled with them, and they came to live with him. Whether there was foul play in the case I do not know, but in about three months the young wife died, and Ralph, nearly mad with grief, rushed abroad and was never heard of more. But there were dark stories about, that both the Wybeers and Ralph were descended from one common ancestor, who had committed some horrible crime, and that the curse of blood lay on both families. The boy grew up a goodly youth, with his mother's fair face, and his father's spirit. In spite of all warning, in spite of his grandfather's malediction, he wedded a Wybeer, the only daughter of his mother's brother; but the word had been spoken, and no blessing followed the union; and after a time she disappeared, and with her many family jewels. Years rolled on, more than a century was gone, and yet another member of the family, infatuated, wedded a Wybeer, and nothing but woe, woe, followed."

"It does indeed seem as if there was some fatality

about it," said Maximilian as she paused with a convulsive shudder, but she raised her finger to command his silence, and resumed: "there is but one descendant of that family left, and with that member thy fate is inextricably entwined. Now has come the final scene: either the curse will be removed, the guilt atoned for, or else the families will perish for ever. There still lives one member of the race originally injured, and until I can find out who or what he is, and make the wrong right, Mabel's spirit will never have rest, but will ever be wandering hither and thither."

Whatever faith Maximilian might have had in the earlier part of the tale, this extravagant conclusion entirely destroyed its credit with him, and he answered, "Aunt, you cannot believe, or wish to make me believe, that such a thing is possible, that the spirit of one dead two hundred years ago still frequents this earth."

"I have seen her," said Miss Wybeer, clasping her hands as if in agony, "and thou wilt see her, Maximilian, and *she* will see her, with whom thou wilt work the skein straight or entangle it for ever."

Although fully believing the whole was but the ravings of a disordered imagination, there was something in the darkened room, in the wild excited manner of the speaker, that in spite of himself impressed Maximilian, and he was silent until his companion, having somewhat recovered from her agitation, resumed: "I have sent for you to tell you this, to warn you, for though you cannot see your path, one step out of the straight, upright road will drag to ruin not only yourself, but many innocent beings with you. Farewell!

I am weary and can say no more; go!" Her head sank down upon her arms, and he heard her murmur: "When will the curse be removed? When shall I obtain rest, rest?"

He thought it best to go, but told the servant who let him out that his mistress was unwell; but the man, in the same sulky way he had spoken in before, only answered, that Miss Wybeer was quite able to take care of herself; and Maximilian, as he walked along the parade, muttered to himself:

"Well, father always did say she was a little cracked, and this proves it, a more mad person out of a lunatic asylum one could not meet."

As he spoke he raised his eyes towards the sea and fancied he saw a light, shadowy figure walking by the edge of the water. He looked again, it was nothing.

"Superstition is infectious," he said to himself; "I shall have to mind, or I shall be imagining that I too see poor Mabel Wybeer's ghost wandering about. In spite of the strict prohibition contained in her letter, I feel sorely inclined to tell Major Kempthorn the whole story the next time I see him."

With that he looked at his watch, and then bent his steps towards the church, with the intention of spending in examining the building the half-hour that still remained before the next train went.

CHAPTER VI.

"His form accorded with a mind,
Lively and ardent, frank and kind;
A heart more blythe till Ellen came
Did never love nor sorrow tame,
It danced as lightly in his breast
As played the feather on his crest."—Sir W. Scott.

"What is the matter, girls?" said Mrs. Kempthorn, as she came up to a group on the lawn, consisting of Alice, Isabella, and her two elder daughters. It was plain that something was wrong; Alice was looking as if she were teasing; Miss Berriton, a good deal flushed, was leaning against a tree.

"Only, mamma," answered Grace, looking round from her occupation of clipping the dead flowers off a rose-bush, "that Isabella and Herbert have had an argument; Herbert, being thoroughly beaten (as usual), has left the field, but Alice has taken up the cudgels in his defence, which Isabella does not at all like."

What Mrs. Kempthorn might have said is uncertain, for she was called away by some one wanting her, and Grace continued:

"I wish Maximilian Thesiger were here, Isabella; he would beat you with your own weapons, not that I mind your defeating Herbert, though he is my brother, I think that he needs keeping in order, but

I should like to see how you would look if you were conquered."

"And pray who is Maximilian Thesiger?" asked Isabella, passing over the kind wish expressed in the conclusion of Grace's speech.

"Max? oh, he is a sort of cousin of ours; his father was colonel of the regiment when first papa entered it, and now Max is a captain in it."

"Is he nice?" asked Alice.

"Charming, at least so every one finds him. He is so bright, he is papa's right hand in everything; but what would particularly suit Isabella, he is so sarcastic!"

"Then I am sure I should not like him," said Isabella decidedly.

"He is perfectly delightful."

"Who is that, Grace, on whom you are bestowing such high praises?" said the Major, who had come up unperceived.

"Max Thesiger, papa; do you not think that he and Isabella will exactly suit one another?"

"Yes, perhaps so," answered the Major, with an amused glance at Isabella's indignant face; "they will be able to talk learnedly together, and we of the rest of the company can sit by and enjoy the conversation, without being weighed down by the consciousness that we have to entertain either separately."

"I did not know I was so difficult to talk to!" said Isabella, wrathfully.

"Your knowledge is so overwhelmingly great," said Alice, maliciously.

Now when Alice spoke in that tone, the Major had

always the strongest desire to take Isabella's part, and he answered, "You are so *overwhelmingly* accurate in your statements, Alice."

Alice felt the sting and coloured, and Grace, seeing from her father's expression that he thought the conversation had lasted long enough, proposed a walk round the garden; but the remark about Isabella and Max had tickled Florence's fancy, and she repeated it, until, to Isabella's great annoyance, it passed into a sort of proverb, brought up on all occasions when her dictatorial manner of putting them right left them nothing to say but, "I wish cousin Max were here; he would make you be quiet." And even Grace, though ordinarily very good-natured, was sometimes provoked into uttering a similar desire; but the climax was reached when one day Herbert, with whom, as usual, Isabella had been disputing, so far forgot himself as to exclaim: "Well, I do wish Max Thesiger were here; you would not venture to talk like this before him; he would tease you so."

"How dare you!" began Isabella, "it makes no—"

The maid threw open the door and announced: "Captain Thesiger!"

If ever two people felt awkward at the entrance of a third of whom they were talking, they were the disputants at that moment.

"Do I intrude?" said the visitor.

"Oh no!" cried Herbert, springing forward to shake hands with him. "Captain Thesiger—Miss Berriton."

Isabella made a most stately curtsey and left the room.

"Who is that?" said the Captain, looking first after her, and then back at Herbert.

"Isabella Berriton, my father's ward, and the most disagreeable girl I ever saw."

"How ungallant," laughed the Captain. "Is the Major forthcoming?"

"I will see," answered Herbert, leaving the room. In a few minutes the Major appeared, delighted to see his guest, with whom he at once started a conversation on regimental matters. Herbert, taking no interest in this subject, contented himself with learning that Max meant to stay for some time, and then went to find his mother and sisters to give them the pleasing intelligence that Max Thesiger had come at last.

"So you have had an addition to your household since I was here last," said Captain Thesiger, entering the drawing-room a little before dinner-time, and finding there only Mrs. Kempthorn and her eldest daughter.

"Yes; two young ladies, Max," answered Grace.

"How do you like them?" asked Max, confidentially leaning with a brother's familiarity over the end of the sofa where she was sitting.

"Alice exceedingly, she is so beautiful, so charming, so clever" ("a perfect paragon, in fact," put in Max); "Isabella Berriton we do not like at all, she is so very disagreeable."

"I think," said Max in a tone of reflection, "that I shall like Miss Berriton the best; there must be something interesting about her to make every one dislike her in this way. She was in the drawing-room when I came, and when I asked Herbert who she was, he could not help adding, he did not find her amiable; and one of the children to whom I spoke as I was

coming in said just the same thing; I certainly shall take up with her, and see if I do not like her."

"You will be the only person in this house who does, then," said Grace.

"Excepting Amy," remarked Mrs. Kempthorn, "and she is very fond of her; but if you can cheer her up you will do a public service, Max."

"I will do my best," he answered. "What are her peculiarities? what kind of conversation does she like?"

"We can none of us talk to her," replied Grace.

"Why? Is she learned?"

"I think not; at least she does not know many things that we look upon as quite common. What do you suppose she said the other day?"

At this moment, Alice entering, the subject was dropt, as Grace had too much good taste to carry it on before her.

Miss Montague was in white with black ribbons, and Max owned to himself that, as far as her beauty went, his cousin had not overpraised her. Mrs. Kempthorn introduced them, and Alice graciously extended her hand, said she was very pleased to make his acquaintance, having heard so much about him from the Kempthorns. Maximilian made some suitable reply, and then there was a short pause; Alice, in spite of her easy manner, being rather afraid of him.

All the family except the Major were assembled when Isabella entered the room. In spite of the heat she had refused to exchange her heavy mourning for anything cooler; and she seemed to take pleasure, by

the perfect plainness of her attire, to present as great a contrast as possible to Alice's dainty toilets.

She coloured when, in answer to Mrs. Kempthorn's remark, Maximilian said that he had already made her acquaintance, Herbert having introduced them. She moved forward to the table, where she stood with the defiant determination of not shrinking though she felt sure they were all watching her. As Captain Thesiger looked at her he started: the face, the compressed lips, the angry flashing eye, all reminded him strongly of some one he had seen lately, he could not for the moment tell where. She turned her head, and all likeness was gone; it was the face of a stranger. The entrance of the Major and the announcement of dinner relieved the general embarrassment. Max, obeying a signal from the Major, seated himself nearly opposite to Isabella at his end of the table.

Although Captain Thesiger was a good talker he constantly sat silent, having, as Grace used to say, the bad habit of listening to, instead of joining in, conversation, and then if people said anything silly, laughing at them afterwards. He seemed to be following this plan to-night, for he took no part in either the merry talk, of which Alice was the chief, at the one end, nor in the more weighty discourse carried on by the Major and Miss Berriton at the other. He listened for a while with evident amusement to Alice's lively chatter with Herbert, who was her devoted admirer, but he did not find anything to occupy him long there, and soon turned his full attention to the Major and Miss Berriton; and as he heard her short, discouraging answers to that gentleman's laudable

attempts at conversation, he was obliged to agree that the girls had been right when they called her disagreeable.

Suddenly Major Kempthorn gave Max a comical look of despair; the Captain smiled, and taking it to be a challenge—"See what you can do with her," he took up the thread of their discourse, and leaning forward said quietly:

"Do you not like to see people, Miss Berriton?"

She started at the sound of his voice, and answered, "No," in that deliberate tone which should have given the other to understand that she did not intend to pursue the subject; but her present assailant was not thus to be silenced, and he said,

"Why?"

She paused a moment, then judging that the best way to get out of the difficulty would be by explaining herself a little, she answered, "Did you quite catch what the Major was saying? He was speaking of joining his regiment, and he asked me if I thought I should like going into society."

"I am glad," replied Maximilian, "that you render your remark a little less sweeping, for I assure you I was beginning to fear you were a misanthrope, and that by my arrival I had added to your misery by increasing the number of those you see about you; but may I ask why you dislike society?"

She now for the first time looked fully at him, and we may as well also take the opportunity of giving his portrait. Maximilian was then about twenty-five, tall, with a fine, soldier-like appearance, dark hair, a handsomely cut, resolute mouth, and beautiful dark grey

eyes, whose mirthful gleams somewhat belied the rest of his face, the general expression of which was thoughtful rather than gay. Even when his other features were in repose his eyes danced and glittered, and when he looked the most decorously grave, a flash would betray his inward amusement. He was now watching for Miss Berriton's reply with an attention that gave her no hope of escape, so she said,

"I cannot give any particular reason, but such is the case."

"But why?" persisted Max; "every opinion that is good for anything can be explained."

"In theory, perhaps, not in practice."

"I must beg to differ from you: there is no impossibility in explaining a reason; you may not wish to do so, that is another matter, but my opinion of you is too good to suppose that you would state so decided a dislike without having at least some foundation for it."

"What makes you think that?" she said rather sharply.

"All that I have heard of Miss Berriton leads me to entertain such an idea of her," he answered quietly.

She reddened and glanced towards the Major with the hope that he would put an end to the conversation; but he was far too thankful to see her so safely disposed of to do anything of the sort, and only looked his encouragement at Max, who proceeded:

"Suppose, Miss Berriton, that we define it a little. Does your dislike arise from your being overtired by the amount you have had?"

"No; I have seen nothing of society," answered Isabella.

"Oh! then you are afraid of its frivolity and wickedness? very natural; I quite understand. But, Miss Berriton, take comfort, it is not so bad as it seems; some good people are to be met with."

Nettled beyond measure by his tone she turned upon her guardian. "Major Kempthorn, do you know what he means by talking in this way?"

"No, my dear," he answered; then struck by the contrast between her angry face, and Max's glance of mischievous triumph, he fairly burst out laughing, which had the effect of making her more indignant, and of drawing down Mrs. Kempthorn's attention to them.

"You seem very merry at that end of the table, my dear."

"Pleasant company," answered the Major with a comical glance.

"Pray let us share the fun, uncle," said Alice.

But the Major was too kind-hearted to make Isabella really uncomfortable, so he answered, "I do not think it will bear repeating, Alice." At the same time giving his wife a look which caused her to rise, saying,

"Come, young ladies, I think it is time we went upstairs."

"You have gained a victory, Max," said the Major when they were alone.

"And made a mortal enemy," said Captain Thesiger laughing. "However, I hope I shall survive her wrath."

Herbert now returned with the evening letters, which gave a new turn to the conversation.

"Grace, will you give us some music?" said Max, when they joined the ladies, a little before nine.

"Certainly," she answered, and took her seat at the piano. A song being next asked for, she summoned her brother and sister and Alice Montague, and started a quartette, under cover of which Maximilian took a chair beside Miss Berriton, who was sitting a little apart with a book before her, though she was not reading.

"Do you not play or sing?" he asked.

"Neither."

"Do you not like music?"

"No."

"I see, Miss Berriton," he pursued, "that when I was trying at dinner to guess the reason you dislike society I was far from the truth; that it is owing to your love of study, which makes you think that the hours devoted to anything else are wasted."

She shut her volume angrily. "Is that intended as a cut at me because I take refuge in a book?" she said.

"That is as you please," he answered; "but why do you speak of taking refuge?"

"Because conversation is so trite and uninteresting."

"Then, Miss Berriton," he said with a droll expression, "I must esteem it a great favour that you consider me so much worth talking to that you have shut your book."

She bit her lip.

"Thank you," said Max, as the music came to an end.

"Give us another," said the Major, who found both

song and comedy too entertaining to wish either to stop.

"Now, Max, it is your turn," said Grace at the end of the performance.

"Very well," he answered, "if Miss Berriton will play for me."

"That I am sure I will not," said Isabella, too angry to think of prudence or moderation.

"Gently, my dear Isabella!" said Mrs. Kempthorn, shocked at the violent tone, and having no notion of the provocation which had preceded it.

Alice laughed; and Grace said good-naturedly, "Do not be nonsensical, Max; Isabella does not play. Come, I will accompany you."

"If you are tired shall I do it, Grace?" asked Alice.

"No, thanks," she replied; "besides, Max is so very particular that I really would not expose you to his uncomplimentary remarks."

"Do me the justice to observe, Grace," said her cousin, as he moved towards the piano, "that I am always grateful for favours offered or accepted. I fear, ladies, that you may not quite approve of my song," and without further preliminary, he sang: "Pray, Goody, try to moderate the rancour of your tongue," etc., in a well-trained and sweet, powerful voice.

"Certainly, Max, you have done your best to make all the young ladies your enemies to-night," said the Major when he had concluded.

"One's only consolation is," said Alice, "that we need not believe that he means it; at least as applied to us."

"Maximilian always means what he says," remarked Grace, "neither one word more nor one less."

"I thought it was only Miss Berriton who had that inconvenient habit," said Alice hastily.

"Truth is truth, and must always be spoken," said Isabella, flushing.

"Right, Miss Berriton; and as far as theory goes, a good distance beyond. I fully agree with you," said Maximilian. "But I think that in practice we shall find that we must make allowance, we are not always called upon to say all that we know."

"To conceal anything is falsehood," said Miss Berriton.

"Pardon, I think you have misapprehended me. To conceal the truth is wrong, but every one is not obliged to proclaim all that he knows from the house-tops. Take, for instance: we see two friends, we know the one has done the other some trifling injury, is it our duty, if we see that no mischief is likely to accrue to the friend, to rush to him and tell him the whole? Shall we not be rather following the law of love if we content ourselves with gently warning the offender, or even with leaving him to his real sense of friendship?"

"One who could so injure another, even hastily, is not worthy of that man's friendship," said Isabella.

"I fear, Miss Berriton, you are expecting too much from human nature," said Max gravely.

She looked up, angry at being put right, and again she reminded him of some one he had seen lately, and this time he remembered where it was—the portrait at his aunt's lodgings. The thoughts that this aroused occupied him, and before he felt inclined to continue

the conversation Mrs. Kempthorn was giving the signal for retiring. He held out his hand to Isabella, saying in a low tone:

"Will you forgive me, Miss Berriton?"

"What for?" she asked.

"For having offended you," he answered. "You are very angry with me."

"That does not matter," she said; "I am often angry."

"Still, I would rather not go to bed with the consciousness that you are angry with *me*," he said, detaining her, as she would have passed on.

"Well, then," she said, "though I do not know what you mean by it, I do forgive you."

"Then we are friends?" he asked.

"I do not know," she answered; but she shook hands with him, which was more than she did with either Herbert or Alice; but they were too much accustomed to her displeasure to mind it much.

CHAPTER VII.

"GRACE," said Captain Thesiger one morning after breakfast, "I am going to ride over to Haddlestow to-day, and I want you to come too."

"With pleasure," she answered. "Is any one else to come?"

"No," he said, "I want you alone; I have something to say to you."

"Oh how nice!" cried Alice, rather jealously. She had once or twice lately spoken sharply and enviously.

"I am not so sure of that," said Grace, good-temperedly. "Max's talks are apt to be scoldings."

"What! do you let him scold you?" cried Alice.

"I cannot help it," said Grace, as she ran upstairs.

Alice followed her, saying, "Grace, what has been the matter with you lately? You have never spoken the same to me since Captain Thesiger has been here; has he been saying anything unkind of me to you?"

"Really, Alice," said Grace, bridling in her turn, "I do not know what you mean. Max and I are old friends, and therefore have a great deal to say to one another; but I assure you we do not spend our time in

pulling our neighbours' characters to pieces, and Max never speaks ill of any one. But are you not going to practise croquet with Florence against the party this afternoon?"

With that Grace decidedly shut herself into her room, and Alice went slowly downstairs.

Maximilian Thesiger had now been with the Kempthorns for about ten days, and it is not too much to say that there was constant and bitter war between him and Isabella. The more he saw of her harsh, unconformable temper, the more he disliked her; and although he justly thought Alice something of a coquette, he nevertheless felt that Isabella was unjust and hard towards her, and was therefore naturally more and more drawn into admiration of her beauty, gentleness, and amiability. He did not attempt to hide from Isabella that he disapproved of her; she, on her part, hated him; she thought his interfering with her at all most unwarrantably impertinent, but she avoided an open collision with him, for she dreaded his sarcasm more than she did that of the Major, who reserved his for great occasions, when there was a question of authority; while Max stung her every hour of the day, and his shafts were all the worse to bear, because they were given so quietly, and because her candid, albeit prejudiced, mind was forced to acknowledge that they were generally deserved. She was too proud to show how much she suffered, but the struggle was telling upon her, and she was looking worn and ill. Mrs. Kempthorn thought that it was the constant daily disputes with the others, and warned them most decidedly to be gentle and yielding with her; but she had no

idea who was the real author, for Max was too well-bred to hold Isabella up to public ridicule; he wounded her himself, but he did not make others partakers in his triumph; only the Major, who from his habits of silence saw the life of his family rather as a spectator than as an actor, was fully aware of the extent to which the feud was carried; and if he thought the discipline severe, he nevertheless considered it salutary, for having no notion how much harm might thus be done to a highly-sensitive and irritable mind, he paid no attention to the remarks made by the young people as to how strange and wild Isabella sometimes looked, or to the extracts Amy gave him of the various tales Miss Berriton told her.

"Have a good practice, and beat all new-comers," called Grace to Alice and her sister, as she cantered past the low briar-hedge that separated the drive from the croquet lawn.

"We will try," answered Alice, now quite restored to good-temper.

Grace and her cousin perfectly understood one another, and Grace knew what he meant when he drew up his horse in a shady lane a few yards beyond the park-gates, saying, "Now, Grace."

"Well, what is it?" she asked, also checking her horse to a walk.

"I want to speak to you about Miss Berriton, she is so very odd."

"Remarkably so," answered Grace.

"Do you think she is altogether in her right mind?" said Max abruptly.

"I hope so indeed," cried Grace in some alarm;

"how dreadful! if she were to go mad, and Amy so constantly with her!"

"That is what I consider," said her cousin. "Amy does repeat such queer things as to what she says; only last night she gave me a long discourse upon predestination—nobody being able to escape his doom, every one being fated, and a great deal more of the same sort—all of which she said she had heard from Miss Berriton."

"And there is no doubt that she looks very wild at times," said Grace. "What shall you do, Max? tell papa?"

"No; I think not. The Major would come down upon her with his authority, to which she seems to bow implicitly, and there would be an uproar for what, perhaps, is only my fancy. No; I would rather watch her for a few days. You see she is in an awkward position; you are none of you friends with her; she has no companion."

"Can you wonder at that, Max?" began Grace eagerly, "with Alice coming into the house at the same time, so much more amiable, so much more attractive."

"Alice! always Alice!" cried Max impatiently. "I declare I am getting as sick of that girl's name as Miss Berriton herself can be."

"I beg your pardon," said Grace humbly; "I thought you liked her."

"I wonder," continued her cousin, "if she really is as ignorant of everything as she makes herself out to be; it seems almost impossible that a man, however prejudiced and sick of the world he might be, would

bring up a girl to be so totally without knowing anything of what could make her happy or useful in a modern household."

"I think," said Grace, "that she has a good ear for music, for I have seen her start and shudder when Alice (as she frequently does) sings a wrong note; but she will never join in anything."

"Have you ever tried honestly to make her," said Max.

Grace coloured, and was silent; and nothing more was said until they came within sight of Haddlesford on the railway, consisting only of the station itself, a few cottages, and two moderately-sized houses, to one of which was Max's errand.

"Where will you stay, Grace, while I am with Mr. Burton?" he said.

"I can canter up and down the road," she answered; "there is no one about."

"But you will overtire yourself. Remember the croquet party this afternoon."

"Ah! true," she said. "I had forgotten that. I will go and sit in the waiting-room; there is no train due for some time, and I am sure Mr. Jones will let me."

Max saw no objection to this plan, Haddlesford being one of those stations where no one comes, and Mr. Jones, the master, an old acquaintance of the Kempthorns, who touched his hat respectfully when the cousins rode up to the station and proffered their request.

"It was a long time," he said, "since he had seen Miss Grace; he should be proud for her to rest in his

room; there would be no train up for a good while, so she could be quite quiet and comfortable. So, leaving his cousin's horse in charge of a small boy, who seemed overwhelmed by the honour thus conferred upon him, and his cousin herself following good-natured Mr. Jones, Captain Thesiger rode on his way feeling that he had done his best for both.

Contrary to what she had expected, there was a poor but respectably-dressed woman sitting in the waiting-room whom Mr. Jones offered to turn out, saying, that he was sure *she* was no first-class passenger, and that he had only let her in by favour. Grace begged him to let her remain, saying, smiling, that she herself was much more to be considered in the light of an intruder. Then, having known when she started that she would have to wait, she had come provided with a book, which she now produced, and established herself near the window; however, being of a sociable disposition, she was neither surprised nor sorry when her companion said,

"It is a fine day, Miss; we have been having beautiful weather lately."

"Beautiful indeed," answered Grace; "are you from these parts?"

"Na, na, Miss; fra the north!"

"Scotland?"

"No, Miss; fra Yorkshire."

"And are you going back there to-day?"

"Yes, Miss."

A pause, which the old dame employed by going to the door. Having thus discovered that Mr. Jones was away at the other end of the platform she returned to her

seat saying, in a low tone, "How is your kitten, Miss Kempthorn?"

"Our kitten!" repeated Grace, running over in her mind all her cottage acquaintances who could possibly have made her such a present, "which do you mean? we have several, the grey? the tabby? the white?"

"Na, na," in a more mysterious tone; "but the black your father brought wi' him fra the north."

Grace started, and looked more attentively at her companion: she had a pleasant, contented face, and wore an old-fashioned black silk bonnet with a broad, projecting brim.

"The kitten is quite well," answered Grace as composedly as she could; "but do you come from Miss Berriton's old home, she would have been very glad to have seen you."

"She is lonely, then?" said the other.

Grace paused a moment before answering. There was something in the woman's manner that frightened her; and she remembered afterwards, what she was too much flustered at the time to note, that she spoke, as it were, two distinct dialects. At times, when she was saying anything strange, she had a strong Scotch accent; at others, when asking more indifferent questions, her language was as free from anything that would be called provincialism as Grace's own.

"Miss Berriton is pretty well," said Grace at last, wishing that Mr. Jones would return; "but what is your name, that I may be able to tell her who asked after her."

"She dinna ken me, she dinna ken me," was the mournful reply, "nor I her, for that matter, for I

never saw her; but I knew you, Miss Kempthorn, from your likeness to the Major; and now I will gie you a warning, which if ye are wise ye will follow: be gentle wi' the leddy Isabell; remember that she is pining after the auld uncle and the auld hame, and that the Berritons were aye a proud race, and that there is wild blude flowing in her veins, that, if it once breaks forth, it'll break down all barriers, and then there will be only one to hold her, and God help the puir bairn if he turn against her."

Grace could bear it no longer; she sprang up, but the old woman was quicker out of the room than she was; the expected train was stopping, and Mr. Jones calling loudly for his passenger. She drew back a step, saw the woman get into a carriage, and then when the train had moved on, went to ask Mr. Jones if he knew who the woman was and where she was going. Mr. Jones could not tell her name, but she had booked as far as York. To her intense relief Grace at that moment saw her cousin cantering along the road leading to the station.

"Why, Grace," he said, "what is the matter? you are looking quite pale."

"I will tell you presently, not now," said Grace hastily.

Max looked surprised, but helped her to her saddle, gave the small groom a few coppers, with which he was highly delighted, and then they rode off together. Great, however, was Maximilian's amazement when, having got beyond Haddlesford, Grace suddenly checked her horse and burst into tears.

"Why, what has happened, Grace?" he said.

"What can it mean?" sobbed Grace. "Why did she ever come to our house?"

"Of whom are you talking? who have you seen?" asked her cousin. "Come, come, if you are not better we must go back to Haddlesford and see if Mr. Jones can supply us with eau de Cologne."

This suggestion making Grace laugh, in some measure enabled her to recover her composure and to give her cousin a tolerably clear account of what had passed. Max listened attentively, and asked rather sharply, what the old woman was like, for a suspicion did enter his mind that it might be his original connection, Miss Ruth Wybeer. However, the description satisfied him that this was not the case, and he answered,

"Well, we are certainly not to want for warnings how to treat Miss Berriton: your father received a similar one when he was at Cairniebrow Hall; I think you had better follow the advice, and endeavour to make friends with her. I would not repeat this interview."

"Certainly not," said Grace; "I shall only tell mamma. Then, you think there is nothing to be frightened at?"

"Oh no!" said Max, "I should think that most probably she was some cottager from the neighbourhood who, knowing you from your resemblance to your father, thought proper to give you that warning, and we know that the Berritons' passionate temper is proverbial. But what is the kitten she mentioned?"

Grace explained how it came, adding, "It is a funny little thing; it follows papa like a dog, while it spits at every one else."

"Does it not even like Miss Berriton?"

"No; and she hates it, she dislikes all animals."

There floated in a strange dreamy way before Max's mind the vision of a large, handsome black cat he had noticed curled up asleep on one of the chairs in his aunt's sitting-room; but he laughed at himself for thus always connecting Miss Berriton with his aunt; then, to divert Grace, who he saw had been powerfully impressed, he began to talk upon indifferent subjects.

"Why, mamma, are you here alone? where are the others?" cried Grace, as they rode up to their own door and saw Mrs. Kempthorn, mallet and measuring-line in hand, preparing the ground for her croquet party.

"Alice and Florence have gone in to rest," answered the lady, looking round. "I am so glad to see you back; I want you, Max, to make the Major take a turn before lunch, he has been shut into his study with Isabella for the last half-hour. I unfortunately told him that she would rather not join our party this afternoon, and he called her directly afterwards, and I fear he is scolding her. There is really no reason why she should join the game, for she cannot play, and we shall be more than enough without her."

"I will storm the grim guardian's den," said Max gaily, as he sprung from his saddle.

However, Major Kempthorn's business with his ward was of a very different nature to that imagined by his wife, whose remarks upon the croquet he had scarcely if at all taken in. He had that morning received news that one of the cottages on the Cairniebrow estate had been burnt down, and that five persons had thus

become destitute. He had been considering the means of assisting the distressed family, and he now desired to communicate both the fact and his own proposed remedy to Isabella; he therefore summoned her to his study, and laid the case before her. She listened with outward composure, and only when he paused, evidently expecting her to speak, did she say, "It is a great misfortune; I am very sorry to hear of it."

He waited for her to make the next suggestion, which, after a few minutes' consideration, she did by asking,

"What do you propose doing?"

"I suppose we must rebuild the house," said the Major drily, determined to take her with her own weapons.

"According to the law of property I believe so," said Isabella.

"What do you know about the law of property?" asked the Major, amused out of his stiffness.

"Scarcely anything," she answered hastily. "Were any lives lost?"

"Happily no!" answered the Major, "*only* the house and all its contents burnt down."

"*Only!*" and Miss Berriton's eyes flashed; then in a voice that she in vain endeavoured to make cold and indifferent, she said, "Under similar circumstances the General was in the habit of forgiving the half-year's rent, and lending them a sum of money, if needed, to set up their home again, to be repaid by small quarterly instalments; I do not know if you would propose doing anything of that kind?"

"Such, indeed, would be my plan, my dear Isabella," said the Major warmly; "but I wished the suggestion

to come from you; you know you made an objection when I wished to do the same sort of thing before."

"In the case of Hodges, the shepherd?" said Miss Berriton very coldly, "pardon me, that was quite another case; but it is not for me to decide."

"But I wish you to know something about it, you are not so much under age. What will you do when you have to manage your own property?"

"I shall see," was the laconic reply.

The Major was provoked into exclaiming, "Well, I intend you to learn something of it now. Those are the estimates for a new cottage, rather larger than the old one, which I have just drawn out; will you have the goodness to look over them, and see if you can at all understand them, while I write this letter."

She took up the paper in silence; she still had it before her when Captain Thesiger tapped at the door.

"Who is it? Come in," said the Major impatiently.

"Mrs. Kempthorn has sent me," said Max, "to tell you that you ought to take a turn before luncheon."

"I do not think I can come; I am engaged," said his host. "Isabella, have you made that out?"

She rose and laid the paper before him. Not only had she fully mastered the details, but she had made two beautiful plans of the intended cottage, drawn with a clearness and accuracy that would have done credit to an architect's plan; and in one instance she showed herself a better mistress of design than her guardian, for where he had made a trifling mistake in reckoning, she had corrected it in the drawing. At the opposite corner of the paper she had made a spirited sketch of the building when finished, with some of the

surroundings faithfully represented, as the Major afterwards found, when occasion called him in that direction.

"Well," he said smiling, "you certainly have done more than I asked of you; you are a good artist. Look, Max, are not these capital?"

Max accepted the invitation to come and look, though well aware that Miss Berriton was giving him most wrathful glances for so doing.

"Then," pursued the Major, "I shall write to the steward and give directions according to what we have just settled."

"If you please," said Miss Berriton: "may I go now?"

Major Kempthorn bowed, and she left the room. As the door closed behind her, Max said,

"I wonder if she does it on purpose."

"I sometimes think she does," said the guardian ruefully, "for the mere sake of being provoking; she certainly is enough to try one's patience."

The Kempthorns did not yet go into general society, but the mother felt it very hard upon Grace and Florence to keep them altogether at home for the sake of a relation they had never seen; so she had invited over a few neighbours and friends to a croquet party, in which festivity Miss Montague expressed herself quite ready to join, and accordingly she made her appearance among the visitors, very bright and lovely, with a few white roses in her dress, thoroughly enjoying everything. Willing to be pleased and to do her best to amuse others, with a graceful, self-possessed manner, yet not in the least forward, was it any wonder that she gained all hearts?

She was a capital croquet-player too, and after a well-fought game, the victory lay between her and Max. Captain Thesiger's ball was a long way from the peg, but it was his turn to play next. All watched him, breathless; would he strike Miss Montague's ball? No; with one cleverly-aimed stroke he passed it without touching, and knocked the peg.

"That is too bad, Captain Thesiger," cried Alice; "you must give us our revenge."

"You must excuse me this time," he answered; "Ellen will take my ball," putting his mallet into the hands of one of the younger Kempthorns, now home for the holidays.

He then went about the lawn, making himself generally useful, finding chairs for the elder ladies, and exchanging a few pleasant words with those of the younger ones who were unoccupied. Presently he came upon his cousin Herbert leaning moodily against a tree.

"Why, Herbert, what is the matter? why do you not play?" he said.

"She as good as said she did not want me," answered Herbert.

"What do you mean?" said Max, laughing. "I really do not know to which among all these young ladies your pronoun refers."

"To Alice, of course."

"Alice! what has she done? I am sure that she has said nothing unkind; it is one of her greatest charms, that no matter to whom she is speaking she has a pleasant, bright manner."

"That is it," said Herbert, "she was willing

enough to play with me when there was no one else here."

"Really, Herbert," said Max, "one would think that you were foolish enough to be jealous because Miss Montague is enjoying herself and is so thoroughly amiable."

There was a call to one of the two gentlemen standing idle to come and make up a second set which had just been formed.

"You go, Herbert," said Max; "I have something else that I want to do;" and Herbert, thinking that playing croquet, even when Alice did not want him, would be pleasanter than listening to his cousin's ridicule, moved off.

The "something else" Max wished to do was to find Miss Berriton. Obedient to the injunction she had received, not to remain indoors all the afternoon, she had come out; Max had seen her stand for one moment like a black shadow at the far end of the lawn, then disappear.

He now looked in vain down various turnings and nooks where she was likely to be. At last he came to what was called the "Rose-walk"—a broad path bordered by splendid rose-trees, cut sufficiently to keep them neat, without in any way destroying their wild beauty, and ended by a low paling separating it from the field. Here he perceived Miss Berriton standing, her hand upon the paling. She had taken off her hat to let the air cool her cheeks; there was scarcely enough to stir the thick folds of her dress, or to disorder her dark hair. She held a large deep-coloured rose, and as she gazed over the

country her face wore an indescribably sad, longing expression, very different from her usual haughty defiance. Max paused, not to disturb her; but Isabella, with the quickness of a wild, hunted animal, had heard his foot upon the gravel; she looked quickly round, her enemy was half-way up the path, before her was the paling, on either hand the rose-trees. She turned back towards the field, but her attitude was fixed, and ever and anon she cast a startled glance around, as if to ascertain the whereabouts of the foe. Max came quickly forward, and when he stood beside her, said pleasantly, "You do not play croquet, Miss Berriton?"

"No; I do not," she replied.

"Why not? Do you consider it a waste of time?"

She made no answer, and after a moment Max said, as if the remark was suggested by the sight of a pony capering about the field,

"I think Grace said you can ride, but you never come out with us."

"I can ride, but I do not care for it."

"What a pity! I should have thought you would have enjoyed the companionship, after being all your life so much alone."

"Captain Thesiger," said Isabella, "have you been asked to give me good advice?"

"No; certainly not."

"For I am much obliged to you for the interest you take in me; but I should like to know by what right you interfere with me at all?"

"I have no 'right,' Miss Berriton, but having been always received and treated like a son by Major and Mrs. Kempthorn, I naturally take an interest in one

who has become a member of their family, and whose depression of spirits I should like, if possible, to lighten."

"Then you think me unhappy?"

"I do; and I also think that it is in your power to become less so."

"Why do you not say, like the Major, that it is my own ungoverned temper, and that I shall never come to any good?"

Max thought that there was too evident an exaggeration in this speech to make it worth answering, and after a moment she continued with even greater bitterness, "What does it matter to any one if I am happy or unhappy, or indeed if I am alive or dead?"

"Miss Berriton, Miss Berriton," said Max, gravely, "your passion has blinded your candour; you know that both the Major and his wife are your truest friends, and only desire your happiness."

She coloured and was silent; he, to change the conversation, said, "Grace saw an old woman at the station to-day who asked after you. I think she must come from your neighbourhood."

"It is possible," said Isabella.

"You do not speak as if you thought it likely. Are there not some among your old neighbours who might desire to hear how you are? villagers are generally much attached to the family at the 'hall'; do yours form an exception to this rule?"

"I once thought they loved us," she said, "but if the Major is correct, that indulgence is more appreciated by them than strict justice, they must hate us."

Maximilian smiled: "I was thinking of you more

as the young lady of the family," he said, "than as the mistress of the estate."

"Oh! I never made any one like me in that capacity," she said. There was an odd tone in her voice, an odd little look in her eye, almost as if, were such a thing possible, she was perpetrating a kind of grim joke, but Max was gazing over the field, and did not notice either, and taking her to be fully in earnest, he answered:

"Did you ever try to make them?"

"Captain Thesiger," said Isabella, "I heard Grace tell Miss Montague this morning that you scold her from time to time, I must remind you that you have no such right over me, and I will not allow it. If I am wanted I shall be by the fernery."

She moved away down the path, sufficiently slowly to prevent the idea that she was flying, and too decidedly to give Max any legitimate excuse for pursuing her; nevertheless, we believe he might have attempted it, but at that moment he was loudly hailed, and looking round he perceived a boy running across the field towards him.

"What is it, my lad?" asked the Captain.

"Please, sir, are you Captain Maximilian Thesiger?" panted the boy.

"Yes; what do you want?"

"Please, sir, here be a letter for you."

"From whom?"

"Please, sir, I dunno; I was playing in the road when a carriage drove by, and stops near me, and an old lady put out her head, and called me, and asked me if I knew which was the Major's; I shewed it to

her, and then she said, 'Bees Captain Thesiger staying there?' and I said, 'I dunno, but they have many folk there;' and then she gave me this letter, and told me to bring it to Major Kempthorn's and give it to Captain Maximilian Thesiger, and she gave me sixpence for my trouble."

Max took the letter, and thanked the little messenger. It was directed: "Captain Maximilian Thesiger—care of Major Herbert Kempthorn." He opened:

"Will you never be warned? will you go straight to your ruin? For the one moment that you appear to wish to do what is right you are whole days acting most wilfully and capriciously.—*Beware!*

R. W.

"What! is that old woman wandering about the country acting the spy upon all my motions?" was Max's first indignant thought — his next: "Miss Berriton *must* have something to do with her."

A moment's consideration, however, convinced him that this last conclusion was rather premature, as the hints in the letter might quite as well apply to Alice Montague, about whose connections he knew less than about those of Miss Berriton; also that it was quite possible it had nothing to do with either young lady; but he obstinately resolved that if his crack-brained relative had formed any plan of uniting him to either of Major Kempthorn's heiress wards, to cut it short by at once ceasing to be an inmate of the house where they were. His visit was of such a character as might be brought to a close at any time, and he soon persuaded himself that this would be the best and wisest course to follow. He must see them again in August,

but then his military duties would form a fair excuse for not being so much with the Kempthorns as formerly.

He determined to seek out the Major directly, and to communicate to him the circumstances of the case and his own resolution; but as he turned for this purpose he saw the gentleman himself coming towards him. Kempthorn laughed a great deal when he heard the story and read the letter, and rallied his young officer on running away from the danger; but he discovered what Max himself was unaware of, that there was a liking for Alice at the bottom of all, and that it was this which added the sting to every word he said to Isabella, and made him so wrathful with his aunt's pretended interference; and he was not sorry that he was going, for he thought that his favourite young friend deserved a wife more his equal than he was sure, with all her sweetness and amiability, Alice would prove to be; he therefore did his utmost to further his going, nay, he even bethought him of a commission which Max might perform for him in London on the morrow (Saturday), and yet reach his quarters in good time in the afternoon. This would necessitate his leaving the Major's that same evening, but as Max's departures were apt to be as abrupt as his arrivals, no one thought anything of this.

So rapidly was all settled, that by the time they had come in front of the house, Max was ready to go and put his things together, and the Major to seek an opportunity of informing his wife of their guest's speedy departure.

"What are you going to do with yourself until it is

time to start?" said the Major, when he met Max in the hall half-an-hour later, and had told him that all the visitors would be gone before his conveyance came round, "shall you have another game of croquet?"

"It would be hardly worth while—I will go and bid Miss Berriton farewell."

"Indeed!" said the Major, in a tone of mock amazement, "I see I shall have to act the part of comforter to that fair damsel when you are gone."

"Much more likely to have to share her triumph at the flight of her enemy," laughed Max.

"Really," said Kempthorn, "I should like to know for certain. It would be very awkward if I begin to condole, when she can scarcely restrain her pleasure at being freed from your presence; and it will be equally uncomfortable if I congratulate at the very moment that she needs all the sympathy and affection of her friends to prevent her spirits from giving way altogether. I wish you would ascertain for me."

"I think you will be pretty safe if you congratulate," said Max, "we have been quarrelling this afternoon even."

"How very ungallant on your part. Do you know where to find her?"

"Somewhere near the fernery, I fancy; she said she was going there. She seems to have a particular liking for that spot, she is oftenest to be met with there."

"I think it is a kind of penance she imposes upon herself," said the Major. "She horrified Grace by saying that she hates ferns, and I notice that whenever she has been disputing with any one she goes straight to the fernery, I suppose to repent at her leisure."

Max laughed, and went on his way. True enough, when he came in sight of the fernery, there stood Miss Berriton, very differently however employed to what the Major had maliciously suggested. She had in her hand a half-made wreath of ferns and briar-roses, and she was at that moment endeavouring to reach a branch considerably above her head. Of course Max sprang to her assistance, and won from her a merry laugh and thanks, but the next instant she seemed to repent of having thus shown herself in more amiable colours, and very coldly she asked if Captain Thesiger had come to seek her.

"No," he replied; "he had only come to tell her something that would give her great pleasure."

"Indeed!" in an incredulous tone.

"Yes," he said; "I am sure you will be glad to hear that I purpose making a speedy departure from here."

"Really, Captain Thesiger," said Isabella, "I was not aware that you did me the honour to consider my pleasure or displeasure in reference to your movements."

"Well," he answered, with the fun that dictated his last speech gleaming in his eyes. "Well, we are always glad to get rid of any one who annoys us, and as you unfortunately consider me in that light, you must be glad to hear that I am going, as my departure in some sort leaves you mistress of the field."

"The Kempthorns will be very sorry for your going, and therefore naturally I am sorry too for what disturbs them," said Isabella, in a set tone.

"Are you?" said Max, with a very comic look of

utter amazement, as if such an idea had never entered his head. "But," he said, suddenly changing his tone, "I really have come to bid you farewell."

"Are you going so soon then?"

"By the 7·30 train."

"But you purpose returning soon?"

"No; we shall scarcely meet again before August, when I hope to see you at M——."

As she did not reciprocate the wish, he said, "Miss Berriton, can we not part friends? I should not like that you should think unkindly or unfriendly of me. Will you shake hands with me, and wish me good speed."

"I, on my part, do not wish to be deprived of the luxury of hating you," said Isabella, nevertheless extending her hand.

Max laughed, taking it as a good sign that she should express herself thus frankly.

"I ought to say," he answered, as he took her hand, "I ought to say that I prefer your hatred to your indifference, but as I know you dislike compliments, I will forbear, and only hope that when I see you in August you will be stronger in every way."

"Thank you," said Isabella, colouring, but with a sudden brightening and softening of look and manner; "and I hope you will have a pleasant and safe journey."

At that moment we believe Max thought her fully as handsome as Alice.

CHAPTER VIII.

"And as she sat and worked, she sang
Songs of the old, old time."

One hot August afternoon Major Kempthorn and Captain Thesiger were transacting business in the study belonging to the former. The Kempthorns had only arrived two or three days before, and were therefore hardly yet settled in their new home.

The town of M—— was very small, and would in fact have been of no importance but for the large barracks, which accommodated, besides the infantry, a cavalry regiment, and half a battery of artillery. The barracks stood rather out of the town, with a wild extensive common to the right and behind them, the town to the left, and the sea in front.

Major Kempthorn's house stood beyond the barracks, further from the town, so that for all practical purposes, they were almost as much in the country as at Fernleigh. The party was much smaller than when Max visited them before. Herbert was with a reading party in Wales, endeavouring to make up for the time he had lost while ill; Alice Montague, Grace, and Florence were out on a visit, and Mrs. Kempthorn herself had that day taken the children home for the holidays to

see their grandparents, so that the Major was left alone with Isabella for his housekeeper, and Amy for his plaything.

Having completed their business, Captain Thesiger, in a tone of condolence, asked his superior officer how he got on alone with that taciturn Miss Berriton.

"I have scarcely had time to try yet," he answered, "but I assure you she has wonderfully come out since you were with us in July."

"Become more like other people?"

"Not exactly; but she has ceased to look at us as if she would like to kill us all. She is very clever, too, I can tell you.

"You had better instruct her in military matters," said Max; "perhaps she may be able to govern a regiment as well as she can manage an estate. But I hope she will not take up the strong-minded learned line, we have quite enough of that in Mrs. Bell, the Adjutant's wife."

"No fear," said the Major, "the slightest hint that she knows anything is sufficient to drive her back into the deepest reserve. Will you stay to tea?"

"How will Miss Berriton like that?"

"Oh, it is a bargain; I am going to dine with the mess, and leave her the whole evening free, on condition that I may bring any one I like in to afternoon tea; she will entertain you as a matter of duty."

"Complimentary to your proposed visitors," said Max as they went along the passage and stepped out into the lawn, which was small but very pretty, with a clump of trees at one end, and under these trees with their backs to the house sat Miss Berriton and Amy.

As they came nearer they heard that Isabella was singing some wild, plaintive old ditty in a sweet and powerful, though uncultivated voice. The gentlemen looked at one another; here was another discovery of this strange piece of contradiction. They remained at some little distance until the song was finished, when Amy exclaimed:—

"Now tell me the story of the necklace."

"Thank you, Isa," said the Major, coming up behind (he had discovered this name in one of her books, and often used it, rather to his ward's annoyance), "you have given pleasure to more persons than you imagined. Here is Captain Thesiger come to pay his respects to you."

Isabella rose, and as she received his greeting, the remembrance of their parting flashed upon her and she coloured deeply. The Major looked at her, smiled slightly, then with, "Take a seat, Max," he threw himself on the turf beside his little girl, who said coaxingly,

"Papa, please go away."

"Why, my dear?" said her father.

"How very inhospitable, Amy!" exclaimed the Captain.

"Isabella was going to tell me a story, and I do so want to hear it."

"Perhaps Isa will tell it to me too," said the Major, looking up at her, as she sat a little above them on a bench at the foot of the tree.

"It is very simple, only a tale of my ancestors," said Miss Berriton coldly.

"Nevertheless, let us hear it," said her guardian;

"it must be interesting, and I have a sort of right to know it, being descended from the same ancestors myself."

Isabella looked as if she neither liked the raillery nor the claim to kinship.

"Come, Isa, begin," said the Major, "I am very tired, and according to our bargain this is your hour for amusing me; if Max does not care to listen he can take a walk till tea-time."

Captain Thesiger declared his desire to remain if Miss Berriton would permit it. Isabella, though wrathful with her guardian for putting her in so disagreeable a position, had no idea of disobeying so plain an injunction, so, though with heightened colour, she began.

This same obedience was a matter of continual amazement to the Major, and never perhaps had it caused him more surprise than on this occasion, when he saw the girl who refused to attend to his wife's gentlest and kindest recommendations, thus at once, on the mere expression of his wish, do so formidable a thing as to relate a story without book or note of any kind, and before one, too, who might be regarded as her open enemy, and that enemy Max Thesiger. He soon, however, forgot his wonder in the interest of the tale she told.

Isabella, with the short preface, "The date of this is not exactly known, but it must have been the end of the 17th or the beginning of the 18th century," began:—

"My great, great, great grandfather wished, when quite a young man, to marry the daughter of a country

clergyman. Her father for a long time objected, it seemed to him an unequal match, and that his daughter, brought up in seclusion and simplicity, was unfit to go to cities and courts and be a great lady; but she was an only and much-loved child, and at last he gave way. All things were ready, and it was the evening before the wedding-day; he called her to him, and, putting into her hands a casket, said solemnly,

"'Daughter, these belonged to thy blessed mother; her grandfather was a great sea-captain in the days when England waged incessant war with Spain, and he brought these back with him from one of his voyages as a present to his wife, from whom they came to thy mother. See, they are fit to grace the bridal of a queen.'

"He opened the casket and showed to her a necklace of the most brilliant diamonds, at the sight of which she uttered natural and girlish exclamations of pleasure.

"'Yes,' said her father; 'they are beautiful; but thy sainted mother only valued them as showing that if the things of earth are fair, what must be those of heaven. Wilt thou regard them thus?'

"'I will, father,' she said; 'and whenever I look upon them I will remember her and thee.' And as she knelt before him the old man blessed her.

"The following morning, in good time, the bride was attiring for the important ceremony. I believe her dress was of brocaded silk, and that above she wore a blue mantle, and round her neck the diamonds, which had this peculiarity, that they formed a necklace and brooch in one piece, and with the brooch the mantle was secured.

"'What can have come to these diamonds?' cried one of the waiting damsels impatiently, 'they sparkle no more than so many bits of glass; let me rub them up.'

"But an aged nurse, who had come into the family with the bride's mother, whom she had known as a baby, stepped forward crying,

"'Forbear! it is an evil omen. Alas! that mine eyes should see this day.'

"'What meanest thou?' said the terrified bride, 'take them off, I will not wear them.'

"'Hold thy peace; thou knowest that our master will not that thou tell thy old stories,' said one of the maids pertly.

"But the sibyl would not be silent. Fixing her eager eyes upon her young mistress she said:

"'Those stones have a miraculous power: when misfortune is near their possessor they shine dim and dull; but when it is joy and happiness they are so bright that mortal eye can scarce bear to look upon them.'

"'Surely,' said the bride, endeavouring to get a sight of the necklace, 'they glitter now?'

"'Ay, that they do,' said one of the damsels, anxious to please and soothe her, 'mine eyes water now with them.'

"'And,' said the other, who had just made the remark, 'it was my sight, for now that I see them clearly they do indeed sparkle;' but the old crone withdrew muttering to her corner.

"The bride might have thought more about it, but at that moment she was told that all were ready, and waited but her presence to go to Church. And when

she saw the general gaiety, for the whole village rejoiced and was glad with her, she forgot any unpleasant impression she might have had, and when she came back from the altar, and felt her husband's strong hand clasp hers, and met his glance that expressed so plainly, "Now thou art mine indeed; trust to me, I will protect," she felt that all must be right, all must be happy, and as the sun fell upon the diamonds they flashed like points of living light.

"But for once at least the stones had spoken true, for within a few weeks she had to mourn the loss of her aged father; but there was joy mingled with the sorrow in the remembrance of his holy life and death. And the next time she wore the necklace it was happiness, only happiness, for it was at the christening-feast of her eldest son."

"What became of her?" asked Amy, as the relator paused.

"I fear her end was an unhappy one," said Isabella dreamily, "but there is nothing clear, only that there were many quarrels in the family; and it said that one night at a ball the stones were very dim, and that after that she disappeared. Some think that she was murdered for the sake of her jewels, and they say that she is still to be seen wandering about at midnight, and that the lost diamond necklace is round her throat; that it may be seen to sparkle in the moonbeam, and that she ever tries to get rid of it, but that she cannot undo the clasp.

"I do not like that ending at all," said Amy decidedly; "make another, it is a fairy tale, so you can say what you like."

"Then, shall we say that she lived happily, and that as she got older and wiser the stones grew ever brighter and brighter, and that when at last, when she told the story of her youth to her grandchildren, the necklace was so brilliant that the babies cried with delight, and stretched out their tiny hands to get it? does that please you, Amy?"

"Yes," said the little critic in a more satisfied tone.

The two gentlemen had kept silence; they were both struck, the one with the description of the jewel, which strangely reminded him of his half-mad acquaintance at old Biddy's cottage, when on his way to Cairniebrow Hall; the other, with a general resemblance in the whole tale to those his aunt had told him of his own ancestry. The Major spoke first.

"Thank you, Isa. Where did you learn that original story?"

"I read the main facts in a book of legends of the Berriton family," she answered: "such as the magic power of the necklace, the lady's disappearance, her ghost being still seen; but I have rather altered it to suit Amy, and of course all the details are mine."

"And is that book still at Cairniebrow Hall?"

"No," she answered concisely; "I have it with me."

"And what," said Max, "was the name of the lady of the necklace?"

"I do not know," replied Isabella; "there is a blank left altogether in the book of legends; and in that old history of the family that you were examining with Mr. Thornby," addressing the Major, "there is an account of a certain Ralph Berriton and his wife, which,

by the internal evidence of manners and customs, seem to be those mentioned in the legend, to which no date is given; but over the lady's name, over that of the place she came from, and her county, narrow slips of white paper have been pasted. And I never got into so much disgrace as when I once endeavoured to scratch up one of the slips."

"That was because your uncle was afraid of your spoiling the book," said the Major; "I should think there would be no harm in having them carefully removed now."

"It was not for the book," said Isabella with a slight shudder, "but because there is something there which must not be revealed. Oh! we ought not to violate the secret."

"Never fear, my dear," said the Major smiling; "I will not attempt it."

"By the way, Major," said Max suddenly, "I had a letter from Miss Ruth Wybeer the other day." While he pronounced the name he looked keenly at Isabella, but there was no change of colour or expression, and he had discovered that, impassible as that countenance was with others, it could not preserve its secrets from his gaze. He was satisfied, and the Major was saying,

"What news did your respected relative give you?"

"None at all; only repeating her old story about my mysterious responsibilities, without ever telling me anything clear; really I am getting quite tired of it."

"Nevertheless," said the Major, "I think it is a good thing you should be reminded that you have responsibilities, which otherwise you might be in danger of forgetting."

"Yes," said Max laughing; "having neither parents, sister, nor brother, my very property in the funds not in land, I might be tempted to regard myself as an isolated being, with no one depending on me. Miss Berriton looks as if she considered such a position impossible."

"Everybody has some one depending on him," said Isabella, seriously.

"Certainly, you are right, most right," said Max, growing grave too. "If a person is free from family, and a possessor's responsibilities, he at least has those one man owes to another—his example, his benevolence."

"I did not mean those," said Isabella, rather impatiently, "those are common enough, and depend upon our will; but there are others where we can do nothing to guide us, yet where our conduct may have the most fatal consequences."

"Do you believe that doctrine, Miss Berriton?" said Max.

"I do," she answered in a low awe-struck tone. "You would say that no man lived more retired, more free from such, than my uncle, the General, yet he distinctly told me, that with his fate there was bound up that of another being whom he knew not, but whose happiness or misery was intimately connected with his conduct, though he was powerless to help himself; and as it was with him so it is with all of us—we can do nought, only follow where fate leads us, and yet that the punishment falls upon us."

"My dearest Isabella," said the Major horrified, "this is fatalism of the worst sort; you cannot mean or believe what you say."

"But I do," she answered in a tone of fixed gloom.

"Come, Amy," said Max, suddenly springing up, "let you and I go and see if there are any apricots for tea."

The Major glanced gratefully at him as he carried off the child from a conversation which was becoming decidedly unimproving for her; then turning back to his ward, who was gazing over the sea with an expression that cannot be called other than wretched, he said, "My dear Isabella, it is too horrible to be believed, that an All-wise, All-merciful Creator should have placed us in the world to be the victims of another's unconscious acts, or ourselves to be the cause of infinite misery when we are humbly and honestly endeavouring to do our duty; I cannot believe it."

"Nevertheless, you will find it some day to be true," said Isabella calmly.

"Impossible, Isabella! We are responsible beings, with the power given to us of distinguishing between good and evil, and also that of choosing the good."

"All that is true," said Miss Berriton, "and yet it is not incompatible with what I have said." He only shook his head; and she added passionately, "Yes, Major, we are only blind agents in the hands of fate."

"Never, Isabella, never! I believe it to be contrary to the Word of God to say such a thing. Was this your uncle's belief?"

"Yes."

"And he taught you everything you know?"

"No; he only taught me the beginnings of things, and left me to work out the remainder for myself."

"And he told you that your fate, and his too,

were intimately bound up with another—that person unknown to you?"

"Yes."

"And did he ever know who it was that he had injured or done good to so unconsciously?"

"I think not."

"And have you ever been able to discover whom you influence?"

"No; but I shall some day," she answered in a low, despairing tone.

"Have you ever seen anything about this in any book on religion? in the Bible itself?"

"No; but yet I believe it to be true."

"My poor child!" said the Major, relaxing the sharp tone of examination he had been using in his last few questions, "no wonder you are unhappy with such a load hanging over you, I am sure I should be!"

"How do you know I am unhappy?" she asked quickly.

"It is but too evident," he said; "but now that is explained——"

"I have not been always thus," she said impatiently. "There was a time when I was as happy——"

"Then you are unhappy with us?" said the Major, regarding her fixedly.

"No," she answered in a formal tone; "you are all so kind to me, of course I am happy."

He did not notice this, but resumed: "What we do acts and reacts upon ourselves and others in the way of example, often in that of consequence, otherwise—"

"Major," said Isabella firmly, "you cannot convince

me. Some day I believe you will think on this matter as I do. Should I ever come to think as you do I will tell you; I wish I could, but I cannot."

Her face had assumed its usual fixed expression, where nothing more than ordinary depression was to be read; her guardian saw that it would be useless to argue with her.

"Well, then, my dear," he said, "I can only hope that the day will soon come when you will lose this terrible idea. But I solemnly assure you that I believe that while we endeavour to do what is right we are safe from any such malignant influence as that you describe, and that we may enjoy the innocent pleasures of this life without fear."

Isabella made no answer but a deep sigh, and there was silence until the servants brought out the tea-table, when she busied herself with the urn. Max and Amy returned at the same moment, and the conversation took a lighter turn; but as the Major watched Isabella he was struck by the grace of her movements, and she presently joined in the conversation with something like bright repartee: perhaps she was all the better for not being overshadowed and put down by numbers; perhaps she was, in the natural course of things, recovering her spirits; and as he sat and listened to her he resolved, unless they were brought prominently before him, not again to mention her morbid fancies—arguing with her would only fix them on her mind; while if left to themselves it might be hoped that change of scene and companionship and time would wear them away. So amiable and gracious did she show herself, that both

gentlemen regretted when obliged to go to dinner, and the Major began to think that he had been too precipitate in saying he would dine with the mess while the rest of his party was away, and that she would do better spending the evening with him than moping alone. However, when he looked into the drawing-room on his way down, he found her with a spinning-wheel set up before her, in which ancient and almost obsolete art she was giving Amy a lesson, while both were laughing merrily at the child's awkwardness, and as he bid them "good night" there was not the shadow of a cloud on either face.

CHAPTER IX.

"The rain poured down, the wind was high,
But forward still the lady pressed
Upon her road of charity."

ONE Saturday afternoon, a few days after the events related in our last chapter, Max Thesiger was riding slowly along the top of the cliff overhanging the sea, some distance beyond both the town and the barracks; he was thinking deeply, and had let the reins fall upon his horse's neck. We will not inquire too closely into the subject of his thoughts, but suppose them to concern either his military duties or that safe object of meditation, his aunt, Miss Ruth Wybeer. Thus he continued his road until he was stopped by a break in the cliffs formed by a narrow gully full of broken ground, and covered with sand and long rushes; down this gully the more adventurous spirits from the barracks were in the habit of making a short cut to the beach, which at low water presented a reach of several miles in either direction of hard level sand, where the riders of both sexes among the visitors and dwellers in the neighbourhood used to congregate, for the sake of the good gallop, beautiful sea-view, and fresh breezes which it afforded them, and which was gained by a sloping path half-way between the barracks and the town. Although Max had often ridden up or down

this gully he had no intention of doing so now; it was a dull, uncomfortable afternoon; the rain was beginning to fall, and the distant moan of the waves, for it was near low water, gave token of a rough night. He had not been to the Kempthorns since he had tea there, and though he knew that the Major was away for the day, he resolved to go and see the young ladies and hear what they could tell him about the return of Mrs. Kempthorn and his cousins.

Just as he was gathering up his reins preparatory to turning, he heard the sound of horse's hoofs descending the gully. Thinking that it might be some fellow-officer, who might perchance be his companion home, he rode a little further to a spot where a narrow, steep path led to the beach, which, however, presented no obstacle to a daring rider; and such the approaching horseman must be, for Max could distinguish that he was almost galloping along the rough and uneven track. His own horse pricked up his ears and seemed desirous to start; his master restrained him and remained on his vantage point a little above the gully. The sounds drew nearer and nearer, the rider came into sight; to Max's amazement it was a lady, but that amazement was changed to horror when she came near enough for him to recognise her features, and he perceived that it was Miss Berriton, on one of the Major's most spirited horses, which she was managing with admirable skill and address, but from the reckless way in which she was riding, and the gloomy nature of the scene, looking more like some wild huntress of the woods than a maiden of flesh and blood.

"Good heavens! she must be stark mad!" ex-

claimed Max, and without pausing to consider, he leapt down into the gully, while the rider was still at a sufficient distance to prevent her horse being startled by his sudden appearance, and also to give her time somewhat to check her mad pace.

"Miss Berriton!" he cried, in a tone that his very anxiety rendered harsh and stern, "where are you going? What do you mean?"

"Let me go!" she replied, breathlessly, "I am on an errand of life and death."

"I cannot allow you to proceed thus, your guardian being away," replied Max. "Miss Berriton, you must go back."

These last words roused Isabella's high spirit. "And who is to make me?" she said.

"I will!"

"*Never!*" she answered through her closed teeth, and struck her horse sharply with the whip. The animal sprang forward at a plunging gallop, and Max tightened his own rein for fear that pursuit might madden her to do something desperate.

He breathed more freely when he saw how firmly she sat her steed, and how unerringly she guided him through the broken ground, until she reached the beach, when she made straight for the sea. A horrible thought crossed his brain: was she about to commit suicide by rushing into the foaming waves? No; she turned to the right. Then Max set spurs to his horse, aware that for the moment the game was his; by keeping close under the cliffs, he would cut off a corner, and he knew that a number of rocks stretching from the sea up towards the cliff, would oblige Isabella

to direct her course that way, and that therefore he would be again by her side at scarcely a quarter of a mile's distance from where he then was. His calculation proved correct, and when she saw his obstinacy in joining her, she slackened her pace and came up at a quiet canter. Addressing him haughtily and very calmly she said, "May I ask for what reason Captain Thesiger has followed me thus far?"

"I am surprised," replied Max, a little abashed, "to meet Miss Berriton out alone at such a distance from home."

"I tell you I have business of importance," she answered; "but you need not fear, I am doing no wrong. Major Kempthorn is not at home, but if he were he would not object to what I am doing now."

"He would not," she repeated, as Max looked incredulous. "He has given us leave to go out riding whenever we liked, and said, that unless we went to the town there was no necessity for a groom."

"Yes, Miss Berriton; but allow me to observe, that he never contemplated your going out otherwise than by twos and threes."

"And do you suppose," said Isabella rather scornfully, "that I should bring Amy out on such a night as this? I hope I know rather better than that how to take care of her."

"Is your errand of such haste that you could not even wait for a groom?"

"I tell you," said Miss Berriton impatiently, "that it is of life and death. I heard to-day that the son of a former tenant on the Berriton estate is dying, he desires to see me before his death. I could not on such

a summons stop to consider whether Major Kempthorn would be back to-night or to-morrow; all the men, taking advantage of their master's absence, are out, so I got the boy to saddle my horse and came. And now, Captain Thesiger, having answered as fully as I can to all the questions that you have been pleased to put to me, may I be allowed to continue my way, or else I shall hardly get to Herton and back before evening, and I have no wish either to be benighted or caught by the tide."

"Certainly," said Max, "I have no wish to detain you; but I should be much relieved if you would permit me to accompany you?"

"You take a very kind interest in me truly, sir," said Isabella haughtily; "but I can only accept your proffer on one condition, that you will not attempt to detain me, or to interfere with me in any way, I know my own business and I mean to do it."

"I have neither wish nor right to do anything of the sort," said Max, "I only desire to be a protection to you."

Isabella slightly smiled.

"Then I may accompany you?"

"If you can," she answered; "but you horse looks tired, and I ride fast."

Max, who was one of the best horsemen in his regiment, looked as if he thought there would not be much difficulty in this, but he soon found that she had spoken truth. She rode at the most reckless, headlong pace, guiding her horse, however, with a degree of precision that amazed her companion, who, well acquainted as he was with every rock, stone, and curve, yet did not

know better how to take advantage of each turn or winding-path, how better to avoid impassable rocks, while he certainly hesitated at trusting himself without consideration to the dangerous parts. Involuntarily drawing rein while Isabella dashed on, leaping this rock, splashing through that pool with the greatest apparent indifference, at last he ventured to say, "Is such mad haste absolutely necessary, Miss Berriton? Would it be of so much consequence if you rode at a more reasonable rate, and arrived there a quarter of an hour later?"

"When I have anything to do I like to do it as quickly as may be," she answered; "but pray do not let me incommode you; I never ask for companionship where I can quite well manage alone, and I should be sorry to think that I had put you to any inconvenience."

If anything had been wanting to make Max resolve to go with her at all price, the shade of contempt in her last words would have supplied it; he only answered her by a bow, and they continued their way. They had been riding for nearly an hour when they came in sight of the village of Herton, consisting of a few cottages straggling along the shore, and a good many more out of sight inland. It was to one of those on the shore that Isabella was bound. All the inhabitants were within-doors, and the sight of riders was too frequent for the sound of the horse's hoofs to attract any curious gazers.

Arrived near her cottage Isabella drew rein.

"You will wait for me?" she said questioningly.

"Certainly," said Max.

"Then may I trouble you to hold my horse? If you wish to take a turn while I am engaged I can fasten him to that nail on the wall."

"I will take him with pleasure," replied Max, preparing to descend in order to help her to dismount; but she was off her saddle in a moment, patting her steed as she said, "Good fellow, you have have carried me well," threw the rein to Max, gathered her habit around her, and disappeared into the cottage.

Captain Thesiger found himself in an, to say the least, equivocal position: acting duteous squire to a young lady of whom he had declared he most highly disapproved, and with whom he rarely had five minutes amiable conversation. He laughed noiselessly at the strange contradiction of things, took the horses for a turn up the village, then, as there was no sign of Miss Berriton, he rode to a spot from whence he had a good view of the sea, and far enough from the cottage to prevent his suspicious companion imagining he in any way intended to pry into her secrets.

The scene was dreary in the extreme: the sea was a deep leaden colour, the sky one sheet of grey; the waves moaned along the shore, and the wind whistled among the long rushes that covered the holms and hillocks. Suddenly the horses gave a violent start, then plunged wildly, and it was some moments before Captain Thesiger had them again under full control, and then they were trembling in every limb. He looked round for the cause of their alarm, but perceived nothing but an old woman who appeared to be very inoffensively sitting by the roadside. Her cloak, which was of duffle colour, could not, he thought, be the

cause which disturbed his steeds' nerves, irrascible though he knew these to be. As soon as she saw she had attracted his attention she rose, saying in a shrill, unmelodious voice,

"Parding, Captain; but I was afeared you would lose your little pussy."

"My pussy!" repeated Thesiger, thinking of the only cat he possessed, a tabby, which had come down from his childish days, and which he had left taking refuge from the unkindliness of the weather in the folds of his military cloak.

"Yes; your little pussy," replied the old woman confidently; "it has followed you beautiful. I watched it bounding after you when first you came through the village with the young lady, but when you stopped it lay down quite tired like; I was afeared you might forget it, and lose it, as you rode away without noticing it, so I picked it up and dried it, and have been waiting here till you should look round to give it you."

Max was now completely puzzled. The idea of his well-conducted cat rushing after him through rain and wind was too absurd; besides, that respectable animal's prominent characteristic was certainly not the superabundant activity here ascribed to it.

"You must have made some mistake, good woman," he said. "I have a cat, it is true, but far too old a one to run after me."

"I have not indeed, sir," she persisted. "See here," and she opened her cloak and displayed a little black bundle, bedraggled and wretched, very unlike indeed to the stately proportions of Max's fireside guardian.

"That creature does not belong to me, I assure

you," he began, but as if to belie his words the kitten gave a bound and alighted on the pommel of his saddle, where it supported itself, rubbing its head affectionately against him. Very much disgusted as Captain Thesiger was at this, he grew still more so when, on attempting to seize the animal (no easy task with Miss Berriton's rein in his hand), it gave another spring and perched upon his shoulder, where he heard it purring just beyond his reach. He had, however, recognised it as the kitten that Major Kempthorn had brought back with him from Cairniebrow, and though amazed that the creature should choose to follow Miss Berriton, between whom and itself there was supposed to exist a mutual repugnance, he felt that it was another mystery impossible to solve at present, so he made the best of it by answering, "It is not mine, but I believe it belongs to one of my friends, and must have come with us by mistake; I will take it home when I return; thank you very much for bringing it."

"You are quite welcome," said the old woman, dropping him a curtsey; "good evening to you, sir," and as if, the object of her walk now being accomplished, she wished to get home as quickly as might be, she went briskly off in the opposite direction to where Miss Berriton was.

Max felt the kitten clinging in a most provoking way to his shoulder, and painfully conscious of the figure he must cut with the two horses and the little black imp, he determined to revenge himself by teasing Miss Berriton upon the strange companion she had chosen; then, thinking it was about time she should reappear, he rode slowly back towards the cottage.

CHAPTER X.

"The burning fever raged,
There was madness in his eye,
His words were wildly mingled
With truth and mystery."

When Isabella Berriton entered the cottage of the man, for the sake of whom she had come so far, she found herself in a small room, which, from the general air of untidiness which pervaded, and with the wretched evening outside, had a most dismal aspect. On the table were the unwashed dinner things; the fire was a heap of grey ashes; a chair was thrown back against the miserable sofa as if some one had risen at a hasty summons leaving the scanty meal yet unfinished. Nobody was in the room, but there was a murmur of voices from the adjoining apartment. Isabella tapped on the table with her riding-whip to attract attention: this had the desired effect, for a young woman entered, pale and anxious-eyed from long watching.

"Mrs. Brockton, I believe?" said Isabella.

"Yes, ma'am," said the woman, then evidently mistaking the cause of Isabella's visit. "It is a dreadful night, ma'am, and I am sorry to have no better place to offer you; but I have been with my master ever since noon, if you will take a seat I will soon make up a bit of fire for you to dry your habit."

"I am Isabella Berriton," said the young lady, slowly and distinctly, that her words might reach the brain as well as the ear of the wearied watcher, "and I have come over to see your husband as you asked me."

"Is it indeed true?" cried Mrs. Brockton, clasping her hands. "God bless you for it, Miss; now my poor husband will be able to sleep. If you only knew how he keeps on repeating, 'If Miss Berriton were but here.'"

This effusion rather embarrassed Isabella, and she put an end to it, saying a little severely, "I received your message, and what could I do but come?"

"It is not every young lady who would come out on such a night at the call of the like of us," replied Mrs. Brockton promptly, and went to see if her husband could receive the visitor. In a minute or two she returned saying, "Oh, Miss, he is so anxious for you to come to him; he recognized your voice when first you spoke."

Isabella accordingly followed her into the bed-room, where lay a man with glittering eyes and fever-flushed cheeks. So strong did he seem as he raised himself on his elbow at her entrance, that it required a more experienced person than Isabella to perceive how near the end was, and her feeling was almost as if she had been deceived as to the urgency of the call.

"Open the shutter, wife," cried the sick man fretfully; "let me be sure that it is one of the old race."

"The window is open, Joe," said his wife soothingly; "it is the night that is so awfu' dark."

Joe sank back with a sharp accent of disappoint-

ment. "Then it is too late," he said; "the fault is in mine own eyes."

"You wanted to speak to me, Joe Brockton," said Isabella, coming forward to the side of the bed.

"It is the same voice," cried Joe with a start, "the same voice that told me the secret, and bade me keep it till I died. But is there any one here?" he added, looking fearfully round, "the very walls have ears, and will repeat the tale."

Isabella signed to the wife to leave the room, saying in a low tone, "I will not allow your husband to go on talking if I see it is tiring him."

The woman obeyed, and busied herself about some household work in the outer chamber. Perhaps long watching and the sense of coming grief had dulled her spirit of curiosity.

"We are quite alone now, Joe," said Isabella, seating herself by the bed, "and you must speak quickly, for it is getting dark, and I must return."

Joe had apparently been collecting his thoughts, for he at once began, in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice:

"Your ancestors, Miss Berriton, were wild folk. When they could not obtain what they wanted by gift or by sale they took it by force; in your veins run the same blood, and it may do the same things again. You may shake your head and look incredulous, but it is so; it is sleeping now, but should anything occur to wake it, its force is irresistible."

"I know I have the family bad temper," said Isabella, smiling a little.

Joe smiled too, but it was in compassion for her ignorance. He resumed: "Your grandfather was a

hard man. His first wife, whom he married when he was very young, never contradicted him, and their life was tolerably happy; but she died, and then he married again, a young and extremely beautiful lady, but one of a fated family."

"Joe," interrupted Isabella, "you must be precise both in names and dates, if what you tell is to be used as testimony to clear up the mystery that hangs over that part of our family history."

"I never knew the lady's name, Miss Berriton, only that she was a near relative of her husband's, and that the step-daughters strongly resembled her. Nothing but discomfort and misery followed the marriage: she quarrelled with her husband's eldest son. Geoffrey Berriton was proud and violent, but he knew there was one person to whom he must bow, and there was peace between father and son; and it was Geoffrey's part that the old man took, not that of his young wife. Things were, however, put straight again for the present, and when soon after she gave birth to a little daughter, she was nursed by the step-daughters with kindness and affection, and all seemed to be going on well; but before long the trouble broke out again and could no longer be concealed from the household, the servants, and the tenants. One of the first to know was my father (for I am of gentle blood, Miss Berriton), then tutor to some of the younger boys; he had ventured to raise his eyes to one of the daughters of the house, and they said that Rose Berriton, of a gentler mould than her sisters, was not indifferent to him. Geoffrey was the first to discover the passion, and he swore that it should not be, terrifying his sister by the violence of

his anger, though he mercifully forbore to bring the matter before his father. But Rose's drooping was noticed by Mrs. Berriton; she won the girl's confidence, and whether from the wild desire of revenging herself upon Geoffrey for what he had made her suffer, or whether a foolish romantic notion (she was not much older than Rose herself) made her forget everything else, she hotly encouraged the suit. In vain Geoffrey remonstrated with all three. Mrs. Berriton said that here she meant to have her own way; the tutor, strong in her support, refused to listen; and Rose, though she trembled and cried, persisted in her passion.

"In this difficulty Geoffrey took his eldest sister, Katherine, into his counsel, and together they set to work to defeat their step-mother. I believe Rose suffered agonies. Katherine never ceased to exhort and entreat her to desist; Mrs. Berriton that she would be firm; while Geoffrey never let the tutor out of his sight. She had no one to whom to turn for real sympathy, for if, of the two contending factions, Mrs. Berriton was the most blinded by passion and the least desirous of her true good, her brother and sister were too proud, as well as too much ashamed of her, to show her any gentle kindness, and her other sister, Charlotte, was too cold and far off for the poor girl to dare to confide in her. Of her brothers one was too young to understand the matter, and the other, Ralph, followed Geoffrey in everything."

"I thought my uncle was the son of the second marriage?" interrupted Isabella.

"There was but one daughter, Miss Berriton," said the sick man, impatient at being disturbed in his tale.

"And was she my mother?" asked Isabella.

"Let me finish, Miss Berriton, while I have strength," said the invalid, "the day wanes, and there are horrors to be told that will freeze both our hearts."

"Amid such misery Rose gradually grew pale and thin, her looks were noticed by her father; and Mrs. Berriton, on being consulted by him as to the cause of the change, ascribed it in great part to her brother's tyranny. Geoffrey was exceedingly angry, and feeling no consideration for an enemy who had, even though so slightly, violated the truth, he came out on the spot with the whole story. There was a terrible scene: General Berriton summoned Rose to his study. There were only two of his children who did not quail before him, Geoffrey and his eldest daughter, and when, a quarter of an hour later, the General violently rang his bell and desired Miss Berriton to be sent to him, Rose was lying in a dead faint. He delivered her into her sister's care, and then went to his wife's room.

"What passed between them no one knows but themselves—and God! but when he left the room, with his hand on the door, the last words of the dialogue were heard through the house — on Mrs. Berriton's part they were, 'Then, if you treat me with no more consideration, if you have more respect for the word of your eldest son than for mine, then all I can say is, I will no longer remain under your roof; I will seek refuge from your tyranny among my own relations.' And the old man answered her, in a voice choked with passion, 'You may go;' and going downstairs he locked himself into the library.

"It was a fearful storm that night: the lightning

flashed, the thunder roared, and the rain poured down in torrents. Within there was a scene of scarcely less desolation: Rose lay delirious, watched by her sister; the tutor was a prisoner in his room, guarded by Geoffrey; and the two heads of the household were locked into their respective chambers. Towards three o'clock, Rose being a little quieter, Katherine could attend to Charlotte, who had come to the door and was impatiently signing to her.

"'Do you know, Katharine,' she said when her sister came to her, 'Mrs. Berriton has been in her room ever since this morning, refusing admittance to every one? she has had nothing to eat or drink; the poor baby must at least need attention.'

"'My father?' asked Katherine.

"'Still in the library.'

"Desiring Charlotte to take her place by the bed Katherine went up to Mrs. Berriton's apartments. All was dark and silent there, and the outer door fast locked, nor could she obtain any answer to her repeated knockings. She went to the servants' rooms, they were all in bed; she then went in search of her eldest brother, whom she found in a little room adjoining the tutor's, reading. He told her to prevent gossip he had sent the household to bed, and that only the butler and himself were watching; that Mrs. Berriton's personal attendant had been to her room during the evening, and had received for answer that she needed nothing, and only desired to be left alone. However, on his sister's representations, he went to his father to see if he would authorise anything, but he only obtained a most decided order to do as he chose, only

on no account to come near him. The brother and sister then returned to their posts."

"Do not look at me in that eager way, Miss Berriton," cried the sick man suddenly, with an exclamation as if of pain. "My father may have caused you suffering, but at least your family were not blameless."

"You are exhausting yourself," said Isabella, soothingly, giving him water. "Tell the remainder more briefly, or at another time."

"To-night! to-night!" cried the invalid, "and as it was told to me I promised to repeat it, word for word; and whatever happens I keep my promise."

And she whose motto it was, "Better death than a broken word," made no further objection, and after a moment the invalid resumed more calmly: "At six in the morning Geoffrey came to Rose's room, where Charlotte was asleep in one corner and Katherine still keeping watch by the bed.

"The patient had fallen into an uneasy slumber. He summoned her by a sign.

"'I have the duplicate keys,' he said. 'We *must* obtain admittance to Mrs. Berriton's apartments; at least her babe is our father's child.'

"Katherine suggested calling for the maid to go with them, but Geoffrey negatived this jealously.

"'There will be enough servants' gossip as it is,' he said.

"They went to the room door and asked for admittance, but received no answer. Geoffrey unlocked the outer door and his sister entered; but soon an exclamation of horror brought him to her side. The rooms were empty, everything was orderly. The bed had not

been slept on that night. The drawers were all locked; a few books and personal ornaments were gone from the table; there was not a scrap of writing anywhere.

"They hastily went for their father. He came; together they searched the apartments, the house; no one to be found. The mother and child had disappeared, leaving no trace behind them; but later there came wild tales from the village, that during the height of the storm a female figure, with a white bundle in it's arms, had been seen gliding down some of the lanes and bye-roads; and some went so far as to affirm that a shepherd going out at midnight to visit his flock had heard a splash in the river, as if some heavy body had been thrown into it; but though he went to the brink to search he could discover nothing, all was so dark, and the stream rolling so rapidly.

"But the wildest tale of all was one that had its origin no one knew how, but which was repeated in low, hushed whispers when they saw the old squire pass, that two nights after his wife's disappearance General Berriton was sitting alone in his library, there came a knock at the window, and there in the dim light, between heaven and earth, was a figure with wide-streaming hair, with a wailing babe in its arms; and, pointing its long, bony finger at the squire, it uttered an unearthly shriek. He rushed to the window, but it had vanished, and he fell heavily and unconscious to the ground."

The relater paused; his breath was coming in deep, sobbing pants. Isabella, with her face buried in her hands, was trying to realise the story as having hap-

pened to her own grandfather, and to piece it in with what she herself knew of the family history. Joe resumed, slowly and painfully: "About a fortnight after Mrs. Berriton's disappearance her only sister arrived at Cairniebrow Hall. She was very like her, only a little prouder, a little more vindictive. She brought a terrible message to the old squire: that night of exposure had killed his wife; she had only been able to reach her sister's house, where she had died, and now her sister had brought the family curse upon the Berritons."

"And well they deserved it," cried Isabella, impetuously, "for anything more coldly hard-hearted I never heard before."

"Hush, Miss Berriton!" said Joe, imperatively and solemnly. "God judged them! It is not for you, the General's grand-daughter, to condemn them."

"This sister was the only one left of her race, and as long as she lived she said she would curse them; and she hoped that her life would be spared that she might see their ruin. She stood in the midst of the hall like an avenging spirit. All expected that General Berriton would fly into a passion, but he stood meekly beneath the torrent of words. He had never been himself since the night he had fainted. It was afterwards discovered, by comparing dates, that the very hour at which the vision appeared was the one at which his wife had expired.

"After the lady had gone he summoned his children one by one to him, and had a long conversation with each, and from that day forward the subject was never named, the silence of the grave rested upon it; but joy

never more entered that family. They provided handsomely for the tutor, and he was but too thankful to forget his origin, and afterwards married a gamekeeper's daughter in the south. I am their only child; they are both dead. I am a labourer, and I have no children, so that it is nearly over now. Poor mother! she never knew that her husband was a gentleman. After her death father told me part of the tale, and bade me, when he died, carry the news to General Ralph Berriton. I did so, and he told me the remainder, and I vowed never to reveal it; but if I survived him to tell it before I died to his representative. I am dying now, and have told you, for you are the last of your race, Miss Isabella." He added, his voice, which, for the last few sentences, had been growing dreamy, suddenly assuming a terrible distinctness: "The curse *has* been fulfilled; there is neither son nor daughter left—Geoffrey dead—Katherine (your mother) drowned with her husband at sea—Charlotte, it is so long since she has been dead, that her very name is forgotten—Rose never left her sick-bed; and now General Ralph is gone too. But there is one of the house still left! the crime is yet unexpiated! You have inherited their wealth, and with it you have inherited their guilt."

"I knew it! I knew it!" cried Isabella with a wild cry. "I have felt the weight hanging over me; but is there no way to escape it?"

"If you could find——" began Joe Brockton, but he was interrupted by a choking fit which threatened to suffocate him; but Isabella's cry of terror had brought not only Mrs. Brockton, but also Max Thesiger, who,

made anxious by the long waiting for Miss Berriton, had come to the cottage in search of her.

"Attend to the young lady, sir," said Mrs. Brockton, as the Captain would have aided in raising her husband. "I have seen Joe far worse than this, it will be over in an instant."

Max accordingly turned to Isabella, who, pale as death, and trembling from head to foot, was leaning against the wall, and without further ceremony led her from the room. She made no opposition, but stood with the strained expression on her face until Mrs. Brockton entered the room, when she hurried to meet her exclaiming, "Can you ever forgive me, Mrs. Brockton, for the harm I have done him?"

"Harm, Miss!" repeated the woman; "I was coming to thank you for the good, I have not seen such a quiet look on his face for days. He says that you know all, and that he can sleep. The Lord will reward you, Miss."

Max had thought it most delicate to retire, only muttering half angrily, as he arranged Miss Berriton's saddle, "I declare my fate is to be connected with women's mysteries! I do not know which is the worst, my aunt or Miss Berriton; why can they not act in an upright, straightforward way?"

As Isabella came out of the cottage he heard her last words to the woman.

"Then, Mrs. Brockton, you understand, that if your husband wishes to see me again, or if you think that my coming to him would in any way be a comfort to him, you are to send over to me without hesitation."

"Yes; thank you, Miss," she replied.

"Come, Miss Berriton," said Max rather impatiently, "if we do not start at once we shall hardly get home to-night; it is nearly dark, and the tide will be rising."

Isabella mounted without answering; she was still pale and shaken. With renewed thanks from Mrs. Brockton, mingled with hopes that they would get back safely, they started on their homeward way through the ever-increasing gloom and the fast-falling rain.

CHAPTER XI.

"Do they hear the roar of the coming tide
As it rolls up over the sand?
Hie away! hie away!—Full fast they ride,
They yet may win the day.

But the sea rolls up and the wind is high,
The froth drifts over the land;
And though ever faster forward they fly
They may not win the day!

There was calm with dawn, but the bonny pair
Lay dead upon the beach:
It was a mournful sight, though fair,
They were so young and brave.

There was weeping all the country round,
For they loved them well and true;
And still folks sing of the maid that was drowned
Upon her wedding day."

Captain Thesiger and Miss Berriton pursued their way for some time in silence, occupied, he with the anxieties attendant on the increasing darkness and the rising storm; she, in trying to put clearly together the strange tale she had just heard. To a certain extent it fitted in with what she already knew of the family history; and yet it was totally unconnected with the legends of the past which she had gathered from the servants. She knew that her grandfather had been an unhappy man, but she had no idea that it was in this

way. She recoiled from the deceit practised by the unfortunate lady; but, though owning that her family had been wrong, her hard Berriton spirit prevented her from feeling true pity for the victim; that there was a crime to be expiated well pieced with what her uncle had hinted, especially during his last illness, when he had regarded her with compassion that was not for her lonely, orphaned condition, but for circumstances over which he had no control, and where there was nothing to do but only to suffer: to what could such remarks refer but to this? and Isabella was prepared to endure in silence, only fervently hoping that the Berriton blood which ran in the veins of Major Kempthorn's family would not involve them in the guilt. Joe Brockton had spoken of one way by which the doom might be averted, but——Max's voice speaking to her roused her.

"I hope, Miss Berriton, that your interview with the sick man was satisfactory, and that you have set your own mind at rest as well as you seem to have done his?"

"Yes; no," said Isabella, not exactly comprehending the question.

"I trust," continued her companion, "that you will not think me impertinent in coming to seek you; I assure you my motive was only the desire to get home before the storm gets worse."

"I well believe it," said Isabella; "your motives are sure to be kind."

Max did not choose to notice this speech, which was evidently made in a very bitter spirit, and only remarked, "Of course that choking fit was very alarm-

ing, otherwise I really did not think the man so desperately ill as I had imagined from what you said."

"I did not find him so ill as I expected," she answered; "but he thinks very badly of himself."

"Perhaps, now that his mind is at rest, he may be better," said the Captain.

There was a short pause, then Max resumed:

"Miss Berriton, now that you are easy about the sick man, will you allow me to make one reflection?"

Had the twilight not been so great Max would have seen Isabella's pale cheek and trembling lip, which did not look much like "ease," but the obscurity prevented his noticing changes of countenance, and she commanded her voice to answer:

"Certainly; any you please."

"It was rather strange," began Captain Thesiger, "that, considering the circumstances, you should bring the black kitten on such an expedition."

"The black kitten!" she said in utter amazement.

"Yes," he replied; and opening his cloak showed her, in the breast-pocket, the black kitten, round and soft as a ball, fast asleep.

"I believe that creature is possessed," exclaimed Isabella unguardedly. "If it is Major Kempthorn's kitten, as I think it is, I have no idea as to how it can have got here."

"It was given to me by an old woman, who said that she had picked it up on the road, and that it was following us."

"I cannot imagine," continued Miss Berriton, "why that creature should persecute me. I do not like animals, and I dislike cats; but, nevertheless, when it

cannot be with the Major it comes to me. I dare say it was in my pocket."

"I think, Miss Berriton," said Max, smiling a little, "that you must give it some encouragement; animals have an instinctive knowledge who is their friend and who is not."

"Do you mean to insinuate, sir, that I say one thing and do another?" cried Isabella wrathfully.

"Most certainly not; but I think you systematically underrate yourself—for instance, you always say that you do not care for riding, and yet you have to-day proved yourself a mistress of the art."

"When need arises," she said, "I can ride, and I will do so; I do not see what right any one has to demand more."

"I beg your pardon," he answered. "I have no right to question either your motives or your actions."

Only half pacified, she drew her horse as far from him as was possible in the uncertain light.

The sky had been growing more and more gloomy; the dull grey had been succeeded by a black cloud. Suddenly there was a vivid flash of lightning, followed almost instantaneously by a terrific clap of thunder, which, echoing back from point to point of the overhanging cliffs, seemed repeated a hundred times. The drizzling rain had given place to a sharp pelting shower. The horses plunged violently.

"It is not safe to proceed, Miss Berriton," said Max, as a third flash seemed to play round Isabella's figure, setting both her and her horse for the moment in strong relief, to be again lost in the twilight and the roar of the thunder. "The storm is too violent to last;

we must take shelter in the fisherman's cave, we are near it."

"The tide?" said Isabella rather faintly.

"Will not be high till eight," said Max, straining to see the hands of his watch; "it is now six. Miss Berriton, you *must* come," he added imperatively, as another flash was succeeded by yet another roll, if possible louder than before.

She compelled her trembling horse to follow the direction he indicated. The animal shyed, and almost refused to go deeper into the black shadow.

The place to which Max thus turned for refuge was a tolerably large cavern, extending for some distance inland. It obtained its name of the "fisherman's cave" from the following circumstance:

It chanced one night that, during the gales of the autumnal equinox, a fishing bark, belonging to a distant station on the east coast, driven out of her course by the stress of weather, with masts gone and rudder broken, was tossed about at the mercy of the waves. They had one boat; it only held four, and the crew consisted of six men. Now, with the horrors of approaching shipwreck upon them, there arose the discussion, who should be saved, who left. They agreed to settle the matter by lot, and the two, on whom it fell to remain, with generous courage assisted their comrades in launching the boat; but when he saw it pull away, and with it seemingly the last hope of safety, the heart of the one failed him, and, disregarding the remonstrances of his companion, that for another to enter the boat was for all to perish, he plunged into the water; but the wind and waves were too strong

for him, and whether his comrades in the boat heard his shouts is doubtful, for after a few faint and feeble efforts he sank, never to rise again.

The other sailor thus abandoned on the sinking vessel saw no hope of escape; he was fast drifting towards a precipitous cliff, against which the broken bark must be dashed in pieces. His fate seemed hopeless, when he suddenly saw before him a dark hole in the cliff; it might be the entrance of some cave; at any rate, in it lay his only chance of preservation. He flung himself into the sea, and clinging to one of the planks from the broken vessel, with which the water was strewn in all directions, he endeavoured to guide his course towards the opening. Already he was well-nigh spent, when one monster wave carried him through the opening, and threw him, almost stunned, upon the sand, a considerable distance up the cave; at the same instant the bark struck the cliff a few yards further down, where it was shivered into a thousand splinters. The man thus wonderfully saved crawled along the sand until he found himself beyond the reach of the spray, and here sat down to rest and think. It was getting dark, and he could not see how far his cave extended, or whether he was beyond the high-water mark; thus, though preserved from the fury of the waves, his fate seemed hardly less dreadful, waiting to see whether the water would reach him, which, as if enraged at the escape of its prey, was beating about the mouth of the cave; the tide was rising, and the gloom momentarily increasing. The suspense was awful! every half-hour seemed a lifetime. By degrees, however, the air grew colder, and the sound of the waves more distant. The differ-

ence was very slight, and only to be recognised by one whose ear was strained, hearing in the tones life or death. At length there was no doubt the tide was receding, and though it was pitch dark he felt the intense relief of one who has escaped from deadly peril; and now bodily weariness overcame him, and he fell asleep.

When he awoke he could scarcely believe his eyes: the sea had retreated to a great distance, and the sands lay smooth and yellow before him in all the glory of a calm morning after a storm. A slight curl upon the water was the only vestige of the late fury of the elements. He made his way along the beach to the village of Herton, where he was hospitably received by the fishermen, and where he found his companions, who, after tossing for many hours in their little boat, had at length been rescued by the inhabitants of Herton, and who greeted their abandoned friend with the more joy inasmuch as they expected that they had parted from him never to meet again.

Such, then, is briefly the legend from which the cave received its name, where Captain Thesiger now sought refuge for himself and Miss Berriton from the violence of the sudden storm.

They entered; and were at once protected from the rain and the lightning, but the horses were so restive, partly from their former fright, partly from the gloom and the roll of the thunder, which sounded peculiarly awful in this subterranean abode, that Max insisted on dismounting; and leading them further into the cavern, he stood trying to soothe them, while Miss Berriton seated herself upon a stone near the entrance,

where she had a full view of the torrents of rain, to which from time of time the lightning gave a peculiar brilliance. As she sat thus, alternately in deep shadow and strong light, there was something weird about the pale, earnest face; while her dripping garments and her black hair, which had escaped from her net, added by its disorder to the picturesqueness of the figure. As he watched her Max had a strange feeling creeping over him; it was not fear, though something akin to it. Could it be, as he had almost interpreted his aunt's hints, that his fate was somehow connected with that of this singular girl? Could the horrible suspicion, that he and Grace had communicated to one another, that there was madness lurking in her veins—be true? To break the spell he spoke; and at the sound of his voice she started, as if roused from a dream; yet his question was ordinary enough.

"What time did you say, Miss Berriton, the Major is expected home?"

"Between eight and nine."

"Oh, then," said the Captain, "there is no fear of his becoming anxious about your non-arrival."

"Nobody is likely to be anxious about me," she answered, in a tone of such bitter dejection that he said,

"Miss Berriton, seeing you so manifestly depressed, I cannot help asking you if there is not some weight upon your mind?"

"We must all bear the sins of our forefathers," she answered in the same dejected tone.

"That is a fearful doctrine," began Max.

"I suppose, now, that you are going to give me

a moral lecture," interrupted Isabella, "like Grace Kempthorn, when I once ventured to say a similar thing to her."

Her tone was impatient, but it rather encouraged Max to continue.

"Indeed, Miss Berriton, I hope and trust that you labour under a mistake. Were it as you imagine, life would be unbearable."

"And do you mean to say to me," rejoined Isabella, "that there is not truth in the observation, that when a man kills himself by excess, his damaged constitution descends to his children? or where a man squanders all his property, his offspring do not suffer want in consequence? You do not deny these facts? Then, how can you consistently deny that where a family has committed a great crime, the guilt and the curse are inherited to the latest generation?"

"Then there is some secret," exclaimed Max. "Miss Berriton, let me entreat you no longer to keep it within your own bosom."

"There is *no secret!*" answered Isabella contemptuously. "Let those who read understand; but what boots it, though," she added in a saddened tone, "I must bear the weight if all the world knew it, so let their bones rest in their graves in peace."

Max passed over the palpable inconsistency of this speech, and only said kindly, "For your own sake, Miss Berriton, unburden your mind to one of those who love you, and would fain see you happy—Major Kempthorn, for instance."

Isabella looked at him with a half incredulous, half compassionate smile: "Poor Major," she said, "I

scandalised him too much, when I once before spoke to him on the same sort of subject, for him to listen to my ravings again."

"To Grace you have the same objection," said Max thoughtfully; "but there is one," he added in rather an embarrassed tone, "who would willingly listen to you, and whose brightness of character forming a contrast to your sadder disposition particularly fits you to be friends. I am speaking of Miss Montague."

"*Never!*" cried Isabella, springing up in wrath. "I have the same instinctive dislike to that girl that one has for a venomous snake."

"Miss Berriton!" exclaimed Max, in so short and stern a tone that Isabella was abashed. For the first time in her life, perhaps, her eyes drooped; she coloured, and thought it necessary to explain her meaning.

"I do not mean by such a comparison to impugn her truth and character, Captain Thesiger, be that far from me. I know too little of her to dare to pronounce an opinion upon her on any point; but I have that dislike of her which we cannot explain. We feel it for people often very amiable; they have done nothing to offend us, and yet we cannot get over our objection."

"Such a sentiment is the mark of an extremely narrow, prejudiced mind," said Max very coldly, "and it ought to be the aim of every one who has the misfortune to have such a spirit to overcome it."

Isabella looked at him with a curious smile, as if some new idea or suspicion had come into her mind, and Max had a sudden strange and uncomfortable feeling that if he prolonged the conversation the tables might be turned, the tide of war might go against

him, so he went to the mouth of the cavern to look at the weather. It was still raining fast; but the thunder had ceased, and he proposed to Miss Berriton to start immediately, or they might run some risk of being caught by the tide. She agreed, and they mounted and set forth upon their way, though perforce at a much quieter pace, guiding their path by the line of loose rocks that lay at the foot of the cliff. Presently Isabella said, "Is not the sound of the waves coming much nearer?"

"It is," answered Max, straining his eyes in the direction of the sea; "but I do not think there is any danger. I wish it were not all so grey, that I might see how high the tide stands now; however, we can notice when we come to the next promontory."

They mended their pace a little, but the roughness of the road, and the weariness of their horses, obliged them to ride cautiously. When they reached the rocky headland Max could not restrain an exclamation. He could now distinctly see the waves breaking upon the sand at no great distance from them.

"What is it?" asked Isabella.

"Only the tide is rather higher than I expected," he answered, so as not to alarm her.

"And therefore," said Isabella, "it will be higher still at the next promontory, which is a good mile off, and goes further into the sea. You cannot conceal anything from me. Can we go back?"

"No; that would be worse still. We never could get round the Black Point. There is no hope but in getting on."

"Can we cut straight across?"

"No; the rocks are too many," he said, with an involuntary shudder; "in this light it would be madness."

"Then we must ride along by the base of the cliff," she said, turning her horse's head in that direction.

"Captain Thesiger," she exclaimed presently, "it was out of kindness to me that you came upon this expedition; but for me you would be safe at home. I cannot bear that for my sake you should perish. Think no more of saving me, only of your own life; perchance you might be able to ride faster and find some means of escape if you had no thought for me. I entreat you leave me; your life is valuable. If I am drowned there are none depending on me to mourn my loss."

Max, touched by the unwonted softness of her manner, replied with warmth, declaring that he could not think of leaving her, and that he would share her peril, whatever it was.

"Thank you," she said, and even in the darkness he fancied she must be smiling. After a moment she spoke again: "Do you imagine, Captain Thesiger, that if we were to dismount, and let them go their own way, our horses would escape, get home?"

"It is quite possible," answered Max, alarmed that she might do some desperate thing; "but you are not meditating anything of that sort?"

"No," she replied very gravely; "that would be committing suicide by throwing away the chance of safety that has been put within my grasp; but I think it very sad for them to be brought to share our peril through no fault or imprudence of theirs, and without

having our comfort, that the danger has been incurred through the exercise of duty."

"It is the fate of all those animals that are the companions of man," answered Max; "they must share to a certain extent in his grief and trouble. Look at a favourite dog, often it pines away and dies at the death of a beloved master; or, perhaps, you have the sorrow of seeing it grow old, outlive all its powers, its life but a burden to it, and yet you have not the heart to put an end to that life."

"I cannot understand that feeling," said Isabella energetically, "any more than I understand a person selling a favourite horse to what he knows will most probably be a life of the utmost misery, rather than put an end to it himself; for my part I would sooner shoot the creature with mine own hand."

She was silent for a few moments, then she spoke again. "The water has reached the foot of the promontory; I can hear it breaking against the rocks."

Max listened; he could hear the dull distant roar of the waves, but he could not distinguish the peculiar sound that told of their imminent peril. Involuntarily he touched his horse. Hearing rather than seeing what he did, she caught his rein, exclaiming: "Captain Thesiger, our only chance is in going quietly; we are riding now as fast as it is prudent, and our horses will need all their strength to race the tide. Five minutes later in getting there can make no difference in the depth of the water, but it will make all the difference in the state of our horses."

He felt the justice of what she urged, and checked. It was a terrible moment, hearing the rising tide, yet

unable to see their foe; obliged to go gently when every instant was precious. Their steeds seemed to scent the danger, and tossed their heads and strove against the curb. At last they reached the promontory, and found that Isabella's suspicions were but too true—the waves were lashing themselves against the rock with a low moaning roar. Miss Berriton drew rein. "Captain Thesiger, we must swim the stream. We must keep well outwards, or we shall be dashed against the rock; now, you must promise not to think of me, but only of yourself, until you are safe on the other side; let me sink or swim as I can. Unless you promise this I will gallop back along the sand, and if you attempt to follow, you know that it is certain destruction for us both. Promise!"

The energy with which she pronounced these words showed that she meant what she said. Max felt that she was capable of keeping her word. He looked at the sea, then at Miss Berriton, saw that it would be madness to oppose, and very reluctantly said, "I promise!"

"Right!" she replied; and, gathering up her habit to prevent its impeding her course, she guided her steed straight at the water. So sudden was her movement that Max stood for a moment in a sort of dazed horror, watching her. She rose lightly over one wave; was again lost in the depth, then again appeared; he could distinguish her like a black speck in the gloom, ever bearing outwards; but whether she were mistress of her horse and still guiding its course, or whether both were at the mercy of the current, he could not tell.

He in his turn plunged into the sea. It was a hard fight; he felt the truth of Miss Berriton's observation about keeping outward, but he was ever being borne nearer and nearer to the rocks, against which he knew he must be dashed to pieces—the cliff overhung him, in the gloom more intensely black. The waves beat against his breast, taking away his breath. His good steed struggled on, but it seemed that the efforts of both would be in vain; his head grew dizzy, he could scarce keep himself in the saddle.

"It is of no good, Hector," he said to his horse with a sort of dreamy despair. Another wave came over him, his head fell forward upon his breast, and he dropped the reins.

When he recovered consciousness he was lying on the beach, and Isabella Berriton was chafing his temples.

"You are safe then," he cried.

"Yes," she replied; "drink this." She put to his lips a small flask. He drank; his senses returned more fully, and with them came the feeling that he ought to be attending to the lady, not she to him. Half raising himself he said,

"But, Miss Berriton, are you sure you are out of danger? is there nothing I can do for you?"

"No, thanks," she answered. "I was in shallow water when you let fall your rein, and I was able to catch it, and bring your horse to land."

The matter-of-fact tone in which she spoke prevented Max from noticing that he in reality owed his life to her, and he only responded, "Then poor Hector is safe?"

"Yes," said Isabella, rather impatiently; "but will you please tell me whether or not you are well enough to ride home? If you are, we must lose no time in starting; if you are not, I will go on, and send help to you as soon as I may."

Thus admonished Max got on his feet, and would have mounted the young lady; but, without waiting his aid, she was already in her saddle, exclaiming fervently, as she listened to the roaring water, "Thank God that we crossed when we did; I hardly think we could get over now."

"Yes, indeed; thank Him for His mercy to us," replied Max gravely and reverently.

They were now indeed safe, only a small portion of level sand lying between them and the town, the lights of which lay twinkling before them. They rode in silence until they gained the road, when Isabella, pausing beside a lamp-post at the corner of a lane that made a short cut to the Major's house, said, "We must part here, Captain Thesiger. Good night; and thank you for your kindness in coming with me. I hope you will be none the worse for your adventure. You look quite chilled."

"And you?" said Max, trying to laugh, but not succeeding very well, for his teeth were chattering.

"Oh! I am all right, thanks," she answered, rather grimly; and, indeed, such seemed to be the case, for though her garments were dripping, her cheeks were glowing, and she looked very unlike a person who is tired or overdone in any way.

"You had better go home and change," she repeated; "farewell."

She waved her hand and rode away down the lane. Max, after a moment's thought, followed her advice as far as going straight home went.

About ten o'clock that evening he was sitting before the fire, endeavouring to read, but with his mind occupied by the events of the day, and his body chilly and uncomfortable. A tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Major Kempthorn.

"Good evening," he said; "have you recovered from the effects of your exposure?"

"Pretty well, thanks; then you know all about it?" said Max, rising rather languidly to greet his visitor.

"Yes, certainly; Isabella told me as soon as I came in. I must say it was a nice prank for you both to play when my back was turned."

"Yes; I cannot tell what she meant by it."

"Nor I what you mean," said the Major, jestingly; "but, Max, you hand is as cold as ice, you ought to be in bed."

"I am thinking of going there."

"Pray, then, make no ceremony with me, but go at once. I do thank you, however, for your care of my wild ward, which, it seems, she did not altogether appreciate."

"I never saw any one like her," replied Max; "she is a sort of mixture between the wild huntress of the woods and the goddess of the sea."

"Well for you that she possessed the latter quality," retorted Major Kempthorn, "as otherwise you would scarcely have got alive to land."

"Yes, of course," cried Max, starting up as the circumstance came back upon his mind, "of course I

had lost my control over my horse; but for her I had been drowned, and I have never thanked her for it."

"You cannot rush out to-night to do so, my dear fellow," said the Major, catching hold of his arm; "never fear, I will give all proper messages for you. Holloa! how came my kitten here?"

Max told him, adding: "I do think there is something queer about that creature, and about Miss Berriton too!"

"They appear to have flung their charms over Captain Max Thesiger, at all events," laughed Major Kempthorn, as Max caressed the kitten before giving it back to him, repeating his regret at not having thanked Miss Berriton for the service she had rendered him.

Max coloured a little, and somewhat hastily bid the Major good night; and the latter, laughing still, departed, carrying his pet with him.

CHAPTER XII.

"*At length burst in the argent revelry,*
With plume tiara and all rich array,
Numerous as shadows haunting fairily,
The brain, new-stuff'd in youth with triumphs gay
Of old romance."—KEATS' 'Eve of St. Agnes.'

IF, when Major Kempthorn had forborne to reproach his ward for the risks she had run during his absence from home, he had hoped that in her brightened eye he saw signs of softening and breaking through the cold reserve that had so long separated her from them, he was much disappointed; she was more unapproachable than ever. When she heard on the Monday morning that Joe Brockton had died during the Sunday, it seemed to her as if every avenue of hope was shut up. She regretted his unfinished sentence that had appeared to hint that there was something which might be done to lighten the load; above all, she bitterly regretted the not having asked him what had become of the baby, whether it had lived or died, perhaps it might have been the means of reconciliation. Would that it *had* lived, for then she could have protected and tended it. She still looked upon it as helpless, forgetting that half a century had passed since those events, and that had the child survived it would now be getting old. Every channel of information was closed to her; her ancestors had sinned, and the punishment of their

crime must fall upon her; she would bear it in silence. Why blight the happiness of another by asking him to share her fatal secrêt? So she grew harder than ever, shunning affection of all description and especially avoiding Alice, to whom, since her return, Max had been paying open court. The sight of this gave her an intolerable pang. It was not that she cared for Max, but to a certain extent he had understood her, and he had forced her to quail before him; and it galled her to see him, as it were, throwing himself away upon one whose abilities she could not help constantly feeling were inferior to her own. The person in the house who grumbled the most at her behaviour was the person who cared the most for her, and the one who was the most truly concerned at the present state of things—Major Kempthorn. He had once expressed pretty plainly his opinion that Max was too good for Alice; and much as he liked her, he could hardly at times restrain his vexation at seeing her every day more blooming; he felt as if he would like to shake both girls, if by so doing he could have given some of the brightness of the one to the other. The young Kempthorns might well say that the house was much nicer before the arrival of their father's two wards. Grace was perhaps the person the most to be pitied: alike the confidant of Max's hopes and Alice's jealousies, of her mother's laments and her father's grumblings, and the only one to whom Isabella would speak with any freedom, she had a difficult part to play between these rival claims for her sympathies, and it was only her extreme amiability and perfect sincerity that enabled her to keep right with all parties.

So passed the months of September and October. Florence's birthday fell during the first week of November, and it was to be celebrated by a dance.

On the morning during breakfast Mrs. Kempthorn, thinking that Isabella looked rather more gloomy than usual, said to her kindly, "If, my dear, this disturbs you, there is no need for you to appear; you can be quite comfortable in your room, away from all the noise and bustle."

"Thank you," replied Isabella; "but I had rather come down."

Her tone was perfectly civil, but it gave the impression that, on this occasion, in spite of all her hatred of equivocation and evasion, she was not quite expressing the truth; however, the event turned out better than the appearance.

Herbert arrived during the morning, and his coming threw all the younger ones into a state of excitement. There was nothing talked of but a good ride for the afternoon; and Grace saw that she would be left alone to finish the decorations and arrangements. Florence offered, though with evident reluctance, to remain with her; but her sister, who knew she was not very likely to be useful if her thoughts were with the riders, begged her to go. She was settling to her solitary task of finishing wreaths, vases, etc., when a melancholy voice said beside her, "Cannot I help you, Miss Kempthorn?"

Although, when fairly engaged in conversation Isabella dropped ceremony, when she addressed Grace or spoke to her before people she never failed to use the formal title.

Grace accepted the offer, not, however, with much faith in Isabella's talents as a decorator; but Miss Berriton soon showed that she understood the work for which she had volunteered her help. Her peculiar taste was for masses and dark colours, and this, with the materials at hand, chiefly dahlias and evergreens, with a few chrysanthemums, she was able fully to indulge, and Grace was surprised to see with what taste she combined her tints and arranged her flowers. Presently Grace remarked: "By the way, Isabella, what flowers do you mean to wear to-night?"

"None," was the concise reply.

"None! whoever heard of such a thing? Do you mean to dance?"

"No."

"Why? do you think dancing wrong?"

"No; certainly not. Let those who can enjoy dancing do so; I cannot, therefore I do not dance." She paused for a moment, then said, "What will Miss Montague wear?"

"I do not know. It does not much matter; she looks well in everything."

"She does," replied Isabella; "but make her look particularly nice to-night."

Before Grace had had time to consider the meaning of this unusual request from Isabella, her mother's entrance gave another turn to the conversation.

As soon as she was ready that evening she took up a bunch of white chrysanthemums, and, in spite of the prohibition she had received, carried it to Isabella's room. She found Miss Berriton ready dressed, reading;

she offered her flowers, saying, "They are so pretty, you must take them."

Isabella shrank back as if she had been stung. "Those white things!" she said almost with horror, "they would soon fade with me. Blood red is what I ought to have."

"What do you mean, Isabella?" said Grace, startled.

"Nothing, nothing," said Isabella hastily, "only I would rather not have them. How nice you look, Grace."

"I am glad you think so," said Grace smiling, true to the advice she had once received from Max to take Isabella in whatever mood she found her, and not trouble herself at her wild speeches; "but if you are ready, shall we go down? I think the visitors are beginning to come, and Alice and Florence are as usual behind time."

Isabella closed her book, and followed her friend downstairs, who, with her white dress and dainty bunch of flowers, did indeed deserve the praise she had given her.

They found, as Grace had expected, that the rooms were beginning to fill, and Miss Kempthorn was soon very busy helping her mother with the guests. Presently she found herself beside an old lady who was rather deaf, and who required to know the name of any one whose appearance struck her, and who between these questions expected her companion to be silent. Thus in these intervals Grace could not help hearing snatches of the conversation of two young ladies, seated with their backs to her, on the opposite side of the double sofa. They were unknown to her, several strangers being there that evening.

"Do you know who that tall, dark, pale girl is?" said the one.

"No; I do not. What a peculiar face!"

"Yes," replied the first speaker; "she looks capable of doing some desperate deed—a murder, for instance."

The other began to laugh; but suddenly checked herself, saying in an almost frightened tone, "She is looking at us. I do believe she heard what we said."

"Nonsense! she is too far off."

"But they do say," rejoined her friend, "that people with that kind of expression have a wonderfully quick sense for knowing when others are talking of them, I suppose because they have an evil conscience. Fancy having such a person for one's enemy! anyhow I should not like to meet her in a lonely road towards nightfall."

Grace turned to get a view of the person of whom they were speaking. It was, as she expected, Isabella, who was standing by a table at some little distance. She was plainly but handsomely dressed in black silk, which showed off to advantage her tall elegant figure; she had a good deal of old and valuable jewelry, but she always made the being in mourning a plea for not wearing any; to-night, however, she had fastened into her hair an arrow set with brilliants, and every time she moved her head it glittered and sparkled, forming a striking contrast with her black plaits. Her cheeks were pale, and there was some reason for the young ladies' strictures upon her. As Grace looked, Isabella's words about the flowers came back to her, and she felt an involuntary shiver run over her; but her companion was calling for her attention, and by the

time she was satisfied, and again engaged with her eye-glass, it was an observation of a very different nature that caught Grace's ear:

"How very lovely! Do you know who that is?"

"Oh yes," was the reply; "that is Miss Montague, Major Kempthorn's ward."

"The one who is going to marry Captain Max Thesiger?"

"Yes; there he is, I declare. Upon my word, though, he is talking to that girl with the diamond arrow; what a look she gave him!"

Grace considered how she could break in upon and put a stop to this gossip. Her father coming up and speaking to the young ladies relieved her from the necessity; at the same moment a hand was laid upon hers, and a gay voice whispered in her ear:

"Why, Gracie, what are you doing here among the Dowagers?" She turned towards Alice Montague, who, in white trimmed with the softest rose-coloured ribbon, looked like some fairy queen.

"Have you only just come down?" she asked.

"About five minutes ago; but do not think that it was me who was so late, Gracie, it was Florence."

Grace laughed, rather as if she credited the elaborate plaits and twists of Miss Montague's hair with having caused the delay.

"There comes Captain Thesiger," added Alice; "how grave he looks, I wonder what is the matter," and, to Grace's annoyance, as the Captain came up to speak to them, she attacked him with: "Why, Captain Thesiger, what has happened? have you been vexed? or does your gravity merely arise from your lamenting

the way in which we are 'wasting our time,' as Miss Berriton would say?"

Grace much disliked these little side hits at Isabella, of which, however, Alice was very fond; and she was pleased to see her brother approach them with a message from Mrs. Kempthorn that it was time to begin dancing.

"Very well," said Max, avoiding answering Alice's question, "then you go and lead the way with Florence, it is her party."

"With my sister? I dare say," exclaimed Herbert. "Miss Montague, may I have the honour—?"

"Then I will find Florence," said Max rather severely. "When, Herbert, do you mean to perform your duties as eldest son of the house instead of delegating them to me?"

He moved away. Grace felt rather triumphant; Florence would be delighted by a dance with her cousin. She was enough in her brother's confidence to know how he admired Alice Montague, and she was well aware that such a suit was more likely to find favour with her father than Max's; and besides, she had a very naughty pleasure that Alice should be punished for her unkind remark about Isabella by being disappointed of what Grace knew she greatly desired—the first dance with Max. She watched the couples move off. Alice at first rather cross, but soon recovering her good temper, and talking as gaily to Herbert as if there were no such person as Captain Thesiger in the world.

"Grace, my dear," said Mrs. Kempthorn half-an-

hour later, when dancing was in full swing, "where is Isabella? I have not seen her dance once."

"She said she did not mean to dance at all."

"Very likely, my dear, at the beginning of the evening; but she will have changed her mind by this time; you had better find out."

Grace accordingly went in search of Miss Berriton, whom she soon discovered near the conservatory door, but it was all in vain that she lavished her powers of persuasion, Isabella had but one answer: "Thank you, Grace, I would rather not."

"Here is Max," exclaimed Grace at last, "perhaps he can induce you. Max, Miss Berriton will not dance."

"Oh, Miss Berriton, that is very bad of you," said Max coming up; "may I ask what is your reason for refusing? Is it because you think dancing immoral, or a waste of time? for I cannot suppose that it is because you cannot dance."

"I do not know how to dance," answered Isabella impatiently.

"Oh, Isabella," said Grace laughing, "you are like papa, who always says he cannot dance, but who can very well, and who sits and laughs at our mistakes."

"What! is the Major not dancing either?" exclaimed Max. "I tell you what, Miss Berriton, will you promise to dance if Major Kempthorn does?"

"Yes," replied Isabella, feeling that she might safely give the promise, and that here was an easy way of getting out of the difficulty.

Grace was of the same opinion; for she said re-

proachfully to the Captain as they were going down the room, "Really, Max, that is very unkind of you: she will now have that to plead as an excuse for not dancing at all, and mamma wants her to come; I thought you would have helped me."

"So I have, my dear," answered her cousin, looking round the room.

Grace was too much annoyed with him to prolong the discussion, and Max, having caught sight of what he wanted, they went off in different directions. What Captain Thesiger was looking for was his senior officer, whom he perceived on a sofa at the far end of the drawing-room talking to a lady. He made his way up to him with—

"Major, we want you to do us a favour."

"What is it?" asked the other, "I never promise in the dark."

"Will you come and dance?"

"My dancing days have long been over; I leave that exercise to you younger folk."

"But this is a particular case," persisted the Captain, and then related the circumstances, saying in conclusion, "So you see you must come, otherwise you will be doing discourtesy to your ward."

"Yes; do go, Major," said the lady with whom he was talking—a Mrs. Montgomery, who was rather an invalid. "I declare if Captain Thesiger could assure me of finding a chair in the dancing-room I would come on purpose to watch you; I want to see this ward of yours."

Max at once gallantly offered the lady his arm, saying, "You have no escape, Major."

The Major laughed and shrugged his shoulders, and Max, as he was conducting his companion to a seat in the dancing-room, said to her half-confidentially:

"I should like to see Miss Berriton's face when she finds she has been outwitted."

"That is too bad," laughed Mrs. Montgomery. "I suspect that you found yourself in an awkward position from your rash promise, and so came to the Major to get you out of it."

In the mean time Major Kempthorn went up to Isabella saying, "My dear, I find that you are pledged to dance if I will, so come along."

Isabella reddened when she saw how she had been caught; but her guardian's authority and her word were alike brought to bear upon her, and she submitted with a tolerable grace, only saying by way of remonstrance, "I assure you, Major Kempthorn, I know nothing about it."

"No, more do I," he replied rather comically; "but I see they are forming for a quadrille, and Grace and Max are bound not to leave us in the lurch; if they do not find us a set where we can be 'put through,' I shall consider that we are fully absolved from our engagement to dance."

Isabella held her head high, as if she disdained being "put through."

"Then, Max," he said, meeting the Captain at the door, "we are going to dance to please your whims, so it is but fair that you find us a set where we shall not disgrace ourselves."

Max looked round. "Ah!" he said, "here is one that will suit you; Grace, Florence, and Herbert are

already in it, and if Miss Montague and I come to be your *vis à vis* I do not think you need fear going wrong."

"It will go hard with us if we do, with so many good friends around us," answered the Major.

Isabella was painfully conscious that she was the object of general attention. Though the young Kempthorns had pretty well obeyed their father's injunction not to gossip about her, still it was impossible but that some of her peculiarities should have become known; and not only the young ladies Grace had heard talking about her, but others of their friends and acquaintance were watching her intently. This of itself was enough to make one so keenly sensitive in the highest degree wretched, and when she saw Alice opposite openly laughing, she could hardly control herself.

The dance, however, went off better than either Grace or Max, auguring from these signs, expected. The Major affecting an extreme of ignorance, made his set the merriest, if it was not the best danced in the room; even Isabella herself could not help smiling at times, and though she had said truly that "she could not dance," her movements were naturally graceful, with more leisurely stateliness than is perhaps often seen now-a-days.

"Thank you, Papa; thank you, Isabella," said Grace brightly, when the dance was finished. The Major smiled, and this *à propos* speech smoothed away the remaining gloom from Isabella's brow.

Presently Max, having found Alice a chair and brought her an ice, left her with the intention of

looking for Miss Berriton; he soon found her by herself in the conservatory.

"Miss Berriton," he said, "I hope the exception you have made in favour of Major Kempthorn will not be the only one you will make this evening, and that I may have the honour and pleasure of a dance with you?"

"No, thank you, sir," she replied very coldly.

"Allow me to get you some supper then? Miss Berriton, have you resolved that all our communications shall be of an unamiable character, for I have noticed that in whatever tone I address you it always seems to jar upon you?"

Isabella was inclined to be angry, but she remembered Max's intimacy at the house which gave him the right to make such speeches; and she only answered:

"No, Captain Thesiger; but I think there is something in us that will not agree."

"I am very sorry for that," said Max. Then after a moment's pause: "Miss Berriton, they are now playing a valse, I trust that you really do not mean your refusal to be final, but that I may still have the pleasure of a dance with you."

"I have said, sir, once, that I do not care to dance."

"I beg your pardon," he said, in a tone of such perfect politeness that her cheeks tingled.

She felt that she was ungracious, if not rude, in her attempt to get out of the embarrassment; she only made matters worse by saying, "Pray do not let me detain you, Captain Thesiger; you must desire to be helping Mrs. Kempthorn and Grace, and I am not a visitor here."

"Then you consider yourself *at home?*" said Max, bending upon her his full grey eye, beneath which hers drooped.

"Certainly," she replied, somewhat hastily, "this is my home."

Max was delighted to find her in this irritable mood, for she had lately in her interviews with him been most studiously cold, his sarcasms had passed unnoticed; his provoking speeches had fallen like sparks upon freezing water. In his pleasure at finding her open to teasing again, he perhaps carried his privileges as an adopted son of the house a trifle too far, when he said:

"I am indeed glad to hear this from your own lips, Miss Berriton, for any one only living with you, or seeing you every day, might be excused for thinking the contrary."

Isabella's eyes flashed. "Captain Thesiger," she said, "I beg you to remember, that though some of the inmates of the house, Grace and others, willingly submit themselves to your criticism, I am not of that number."

This allusion to his courting Alice nettled Max, though he rather unreasonably chose to take offence at her mention of Grace.

"At least, Miss Berriton," he answered, "if I have a brother's right to tease Grace, I have also a brother's right to defend her when absent."

"I have no wish to find fault with *her*," said Isabella with emphasis; then more openly pointing her shaft she added: "I beg you to excuse me; I think Miss Montague is seeking you."

She put an end to the conversation by leaving the conservatory by another door, while Max, in the highest degree incensed, went to meet Alice, who had come into the conservatory not to look for him, but to rest. So angry was Max that he forgot his promise to the Major to do nothing that might compromise himself or Miss Montague. With a reckless disregard of consequences he devoted himself to her, and she, though a little surprised at this from one usually guarded, liked him well enough to find sincere pleasure in his attention. Major Kempthorn's brow grew dark when he heard whispered remarks upon Miss Montague and young Thesiger; but he would have been extremely angry had he known what was at that moment passing between Max, who happened to be alone, Alice having been claimed for a dance by Herbert, and Florence, who was showing her cousin a large and beautifully coloured photograph of Alice, two or three copies of which had only come home that morning.

"How lovely and how like!" he said, gazing eagerly at it. Then after a moment: "Do you think I may have one?"

"I do not know," replied Florence; "here comes Alice, ask her."

Alice joined them just then, and without seeing what they were looking at exclaimed: "Oh, Florence, is not Grace tiresome?—I want her to come and see the moon on the waters, she is full to-night; she will not, will you?"

"Come out on such a night? No, thank you," said Florence.

"Nonsense, Florence," said Max, "there is no wind

stirring; if Miss Montague likes to go I will willingly escort her."

"Will you? Oh thank you," cried the giddy damsel.

Florence attempted a remonstrance. "Alice, you will catch a dreadful cold; Max, do not let her be so imprudent;" but without heeding her, her cousin hurried to get a cloak.

Meeting her father a few minutes later he demanded rather sharply, where Alice Montague was?

"Gone into the garden with Max to see the moon," she replied.

"What madness!" exclaimed the Major, and hastened after them.

In the mean time Max had conducted Alice down the garden path. His impetuous movements and words startled her, yet she liked it. They reached the terrace overlooking the sea, which lay stretched out before them, scarcely rippled by the wind, and marked with a broad band of silver by the moon, which hung in midheaven. There was not a cloud to be seen. The evening was cold, and the mist was rising like white smoke in the lower parts of the garden; but Max heeded not either cold or damp. His manner was excited as he drew Alice along the terrace; he was speaking words of almost love. She did not answer, but she did not withdraw her hand from his arm. He paused; she asked him what he was carrying. He showed her the photograph, and requested to have it; she agreed, flattered and pleased. He begged her to write her name upon it, giving her his pencil for the purpose. He gazed upon her with a lover's eagerness as she stood in the moonlight, her cloak half concealing her

dress, her cheeks glowing, while her hand trembled so between excitement and the chilliness of the air that she could hardly guide the pencil. She had formed the concluding letter, and was giving the portrait back to Max when a hasty step sounded upon the gravel, and Major Kempthorn said sharply,

"What are you doing here, Alice? this is enough to give you your death of cold: Thesiger, I thought I might trust you to have a little common sense. Come back directly," and drawing his ward's arm through his own, he led her away.

Max, with the photograph in his hand, stood for a moment as if stunned; then was preparing to follow them when his name being pronounced caused him to turn his head, and he saw with annoyance that in his excitement he had approached so near to the hedge that separated the garden from the road, that not only could he and his companion be recognized, but also their conversation might have been overheard. It was, too, the short way from the town to the barracks: what if some of his companions had been strolling along the lane! The call was repeated in peremptory accents: "Maximilian Thesiger!" He went to the hedge, at a part where it was low enough for him to see over it, and there in the road, standing upright in a small open carriage drawn by two ponies that looked black in the dim light, and which she was driving herself, was his aunt, Ruth Wybeer!

Max endeavoured to conceal his amazement, almost dismay, at this unexpected apparition by expressing his pleasure at seeing his relative, and hoping that she would come down and spend the night at his lodging;

but she interrupted him, stamping upon the floor of her chaise: "Headstrong, selfish! I have warned you in vain! must you needs go open-eyed to destruction? But it is too late now; you have set the stone rolling, and no human power can stop it on the incline; happy will you be if you only drag *one* innocent person to share your ruin. Farewell!" She suddenly seated herself, gathered up her reins, and whipped her horses, which tore like mad along the lane. Before Max could reach the gate the light vehicle was out of sight, and the sound had died away in the distance without his being able to tell in what direction she had gone.

He felt no inclination to rejoin the dancers, so he went into the house, telling the first servant he met to carry his excuses to Mrs. Kempthorn, and inform her that he had gone home with a headache. Then with his arms folded and his head inclining upon his breast, he set off in the direction of his lodgings.

CHAPTER XIII.

Love fears nothing; shrinks not at pain and death!
But what if love prove but false passion? whom then have we to help us
but thou, formerly despised, but still honest friendship?

THERE was a feeling of constraint over the Kempthorn family the next morning; all knew it, though none spoke of it. There was an attempt indeed to ascribe their silence at breakfast to the fatigues of last night, but Grace at least felt that no amount of mere weariness could account for the anxiety on her mother's face, for her father's gloomy and abstracted expression, or for Alice's heavy eyes and want of appetite. Isabella alone showed no signs of the late dissipation, but she kept her lips tightly closed, as if afraid of letting out some secret against her will. Breakfast over she accompanied her guardian to his study, where he was in the habit of employing her as secretary, finding her neat penmanship and clear head more useful in these perhaps more masculine occupations, than his wife did in those domestic matters in which she would so fain have interested her. About eleven o'clock, when they were thus engaged, a ring came at the bell.

"Max Thesiger, I should think," said the Major.

Isabella instantly rose. "Do not go," said her guardian. "Max cannot have anything to say to me that requires a private interview."

She resumed her seat though smiling rather curiously. It was, however, only a note that was brought in, which the Major read and frowned over. Chancing to look up he met Isabella's eyes fixed upon him with such an expression of anxiety that the ridiculous side of the question suddenly struck him, and together with the idea of how differently he would have felt that morning had Max's attentions been addressed to her instead of to Alice, so overcame him that he began to laugh. Isabella caught the contagion and laughed too, and thus taken off her guard, strange though it may seem, no laugh was more ringing and merry than hers.

"I beg your pardon," said the Major, "my dear; you were looking so exceedingly solemn, and I really do not know what there is for you to be grave about, that I could not help laughing; but come, let us get on with our work." He said this, for he thought she was going to speak, and he had no inclination to make one ward the confidant of the misdeeds of the other.

At luncheon there was some remark made on Max's absence, and Herbert declared he should go to his lodgings and seek him.

"You will not find him," said his father. "I had a note from him to say that he was obliged to go away this morning upon business."

Alice turned very pale, and there were several exclamations of amazement, and the Major saw that he should only do harm by making a mystery, so drawing out the note he tossed it across to Grace, saying, "There, you can see what he writes; there is no secret. Read it aloud." Grace accordingly read:—

"MY DEAR MAJOR,

"I find that unexpected business calls me away from here for a few days. I do not precisely know how long I shall be absent. I will let you know as soon as I return. My kind regards to Mrs. Kempthorn and my cousins.

"Yours, etc.,

"MAXIMILIAN THESIGER."

"I have two things to remark," said Herbert when his sister had concluded. "Firstly, that Max might have told us where he was going; secondly, that he was in a very bad temper when he wrote that; he never signs his name in full except when he is greatly put out."

"You are a close observer," said his father; while Mrs. Kempthorn, noticing that Alice was becoming alternately red and white, hastened, luncheon being over, to give the signal for departure. Alice at once sprang up, and ran upstairs to her own room. Mrs. Kempthorn hurried after her; and the Major, frowning, left the room by another door. Grace followed him, and caught his arm.

"Papa," she said, "what does all this mean?"

"That Max was a fool last night, my dear, and has come to his senses this morning," answered the Major sharply; "and I hope your mother will make that silly girl dry her eyes and be reasonable for once."

He released his arm and shut himself into his study. Grace was deeply grieved; Alice she did not think of; but that Max, to whom she had so looked up as elder brother, that Max should have lowered himself to say

things he did not mean, to pay attentions that meant nothing, merely to amuse himself. The disappointment was more than Grace could bear: she hid herself in the conservatory and burst into tears.

Before long, however, a hand was laid upon her shoulder. It was Isabella, the last person she wished to see under existing circumstances.

"Come, Grace," she said, "do not cry; there is nothing really to worry about; all will come right; there has been nothing said on either side to matter. I asked the Major, and he only says that he will not have ideas put into people's heads that were not there before; and I am sure that if Captain Thesiger and Miss Montague really love one another" (Isabella spoke the word unflinchingly, that made Grace's cheeks scarlet) "all will come right."

"Does Papa say this?" asked Grace, looking at her in surprise.

"He says," answered Isabella, "that he does not think Miss Montague is doing anything more than play, and he does not wish her to be made to believe that she is in earnest when she is not, and he will not have it talked about; but I think, Grace, that she does love him, and if so all will be right."

Isabella repeated these words as if they were a sort of charm certain to administer comfort. Grace read her father in all this reasoning. She was too generous to be jealous that he had given to Isabella that information he had refused to herself; but she was amazed at the turn things had taken—Isabella Berriton to be the person to talk in this way; Isabella Berriton to give such assurance.

"Now, Grace," continued her companion soothingly, "do not cry any more, for you are wanted."

"What for?" asked Grace, wiping away her last tears.

"To go to Miss Montague. Your mother has sent all the others out; there is no one but yourself at home."

Grace followed her injunction, still in a state of dreamy astonishment. The case was, indeed, as Isabella had stated. The Major, feeling certain that nothing could have passed to bind either of them, had avoided giving importance to the thing by scolding Alice as he was leading her home for the imprudence of going out into the night air, rather than for the much greater one of choosing Captain Thesiger for her companion.

Thus the matter had rested; and when he received Max's note he felt relieved, and sure that things were now going as he wished, and but for Alice's agitation at luncheon nothing more would have been said. Even then he had silenced Grace; but scarcely had he shaken himself free from his daughter when Miss Berriton waited upon him, and without roundabout question of any sort, asked him what had happened. No compromise was now possible; he found himself obliged either to tell her all, or, by saying that he would tell her nothing, leave her at liberty to imagine what she liked. He chose the first, not without some despairing hope that she might be contented with something of the same answer he had given to Grace; but no, she stood before him, her eyes fixed on his face, drinking in every word, elucidating every fact.

In return, she told him the same as she said to Grace, that she believed Alice did love Captain Thesiger, but she willingly undertook to keep her opinion to herself, only stipulating that she might be allowed to share her information with Grace, to which the Major, not sorry for this way of satisfying his daughter, agreed, and then dismissed her. He had not, however, been very long alone when Herbert entered.

"Father," he said, "what is this that Thesiger has done to Miss Montague?"

"Nothing," answered the Major in dismay at thus finding his secret blown to the winds.

"He has distressed her," said Herbert.

"I believe it is his non-appearance," said his father.

"Father," said Herbert, still in the same calm, respectful tone, though he was evidently struggling with some emotion, "why, when Thesiger is here always to plead his own cause will you compel me to silence? Believe that my feelings are the same as what I told you in the summer."

"And I say now what I said then, that you are both too young to think of marrying. You must read for your degree and put such thoughts out of your head; however, to make your mind easy, I tell you that nothing has passed between Miss Montague and Max to bind them in any way to one another; but were it otherwise, you surely would not let her come between you and your cousin whom you have known so long, and whose friendship you have so thoroughly proved?"

"No; a thousand times no," answered Herbert, whose jealousy was caused by his feeling how very

much superior Max was to himself rather than from anger at his taking a prize from him.

"Then let us hear no more on the matter," said the Major. "I want you to take a note over for me to Lieutenant-Colonel Loyd, if you are not much engaged."

"Oh no; I should like the ride immensely."

Enter Mrs. Kempthorn. "My dear—" she began, "what, you here?" she added, seeing her son.

"Have you any message for the Loyds? Herbert is going there," said her husband.

"Yes; Grace wanted to speak to Rosa Loyd about those German classes. It would be best if she went too."

Herbert eagerly caught at the notion of having his sister with him, and was dispatched to tell her to get ready for the ride, and to order the horses, while his father wrote his note.

"My dear," then said Mrs. Kempthorn, "will you come to Alice? I can do nothing with her; she is sobbing upstairs, and was so cross to Grace that I sent her away. I verily declare that I would rather have Miss Berriton in one of her worst moods than Alice like this."

"Wait till you see Miss Berriton in one of her 'worst moods' before you judge," replied her husband. "Well, I suppose I must come," he added, resignedly. "I will finish this first."

Accordingly, when he had seen his son and daughter start upon their errand, Major Kempthorn went up to his ward's room. She was sitting by the dressing-table, her face buried in her hands, sobbing bitterly.

Mrs. Kempthorn was standing by her, vainly endeavouring to soothe her.

"Alice, my dear," said the Major, "what is the matter?"

"It is cruel to me," sobbed Alice, "thus to attempt to control my heart; but it shall not succeed."

"Who is cruel? who wants to control your heart?" asked the Major. Mrs. Kempthorn made a movement towards the door.

"Oh, do not go!" cried Alice, clutching at her dress as if with her went the only hope of mercy; but the lady judged that the guardian and ward would best settle the matter if left to themselves, so she released her dress and left the room.

Alice's emotions were violent and transitory, and when thus confronted with her guardian, to whom she did not dare to speak as she had done to his wife and daughter, she grew calmer; and the Major sat by her, extracting every word of her conversation with the Captain, patiently sifting each sentence, and shewing her how much was left when allowance had been made for excitement and the general joking style of their intimacy, till, at the end of half-an-hour, Alice, instead of feeling as she had done at luncheon, that Max had cruelly deserted her, and that everybody was hard and unsympathising, began to be ashamed of herself, and to be glad that, with the exception of Grace, the story was not known by her friends. She still liked Max better than any one she knew, and had he appeared would have expected a continuation of last night's attention; but as he was not there she was willing, instead of being desperate, to take her guardian's

advice and think of something to divert herself. He proposed exercise. She said she should like to ride; so he went in search of his wife to tell her to what happy pass matters were brought. He found her watching Isabella paint, and before he gave his message he could not resist standing a moment to admire the work.

It was the representation of a stream issuing from a cavern. The dead hue of the waters under the shadow of the rock was admirably contrasted with the living gleam they gained in the sunlight. The sides of the stream and the rocks were fringed with ferns and mosses; but it was on the gloomy recesses of the cave that Isabella's brush was lingering, as if she loved the shade more than the sunshine.

The Major then told his errand, to Mrs. Kempthorn's great relief, though the difficulty now arose as to who would go with Alice, all the young Kempthorns being, as we know, out.

"I will ride with Miss Montague, if you and she like," said Isabella, looking up from her work.

"Thank you, my dear!" said the Major. "I will see what she says."

Alice was graciously pleased to accept the companion thus offered to her, and the Major felt that an hour's ride with Isabella would completely restore the balance of Miss Montague's mind. It was the fashion in those parts for ladies to ride out alone, so Major Kempthorn started his wards unattended, merely warning them, when he heard they were going to the beach, not to be caught by the tide; "For," he said to Isabella, "we have no one to send after you."

She blushed at the hint, though nobody but herself understood the allusion, the story of her escape having been kept a profound secret. She answered that they were going in the opposite direction to that of the village of Herton. It was a mild November afternoon: the sun, already sinking towards the west, shed a pale light over the landscape, the distances of which were gray and misty; but the sea was breaking quietly upon the beach under the ebb-tide, and the long reach of sand looked inviting for the riders. They were at first silent. Alice had an instinctive feeling that she was not very likely to get sympathy from Miss Berriton, and Isabella preferred her own thoughts to conversation. Suddenly Alice exclaimed, "Oh! look what a number of gulls there are feeding by the water's edge; I will make them fly, it would be great fun."

She was putting her horse in motion, but Isabella checked her. "Sea-gulls only come inland before a storm," she said; "to startle them when feeding is a sure presage of misfortune."

"I never saw anything like your omens and prophecies," said Alice scornfully; "if one were to believe the half of them life would be unendurable. Anyhow they shall not hinder me from my amusement." And she cantered away over the sand.

Isabella pursued her own way and her own reflections, until, all at once, her quick ear caught the sound of horses galloping over the beach in her rear. She looked round, and in the very far distance saw three riders coming in the same direction they were pursuing. She mended her pace to be nearer her companion before the party should pass her.

Soon, however, the sounds grew fainter, and looking round again she perceived, that though the distance between them was considerably diminished the horsemen were now riding very slowly. They were too far off for her to be able to distinguish their faces, but the descendant of generations of soldiers in a moment saw that these were no officers from the barracks, their seat was too slouching for any one who had ever been drilled; their appearance inspired her with I know not what of vague apprehension and alarm. Alice now rejoined her, declaring that it was most delightful down by the water, and inquiring what Miss Berriton was looking at so intently.

"At those three men," she replied. "I do not like their looks."

"What! are you frightened?" cried Alice. "Why, Miss Berriton, between your terror of old prophecies and your cowardice in regard to everyday matters you can have no peace at all."

Isabella's courage was too real and too firm for her to pay any attention to this taunt. It is not those who are really brave that mind being called cowards, only those whose conscience tells them there is truth in the accusation.

"What do you expect them to do to us?" continued Alice; "steal our watches? Mine is safe at home."

"And they shall not have mine without a struggle," said Isabella.

"I, for my part," laughed Alice, "think that discretion is the best part of valour, and should be more inclined to seek safety in the swiftness of my horse."

"You cannot flee for ever," said Isabella, drily; "and mind you, when you stop exhausted, you still have your pursuers between you and all possible help."

This was but too true; every step took them further from the town, along the deserted shore.

"I wish," said Alice, after a pause, "that I had not frightened the gulls, there may be something in the omen after all."

Isabella answered with a smile, though it was a very melancholy one. "We would often give worlds to undo the lightness of a moment, Miss Montague; but what boots it thinking of the past, when that past cannot be undone except in the way of warning for the future; but," she added, "after all we are only talking on supposition, most probably those men are quiet people like ourselves, taking their pleasure."

"Most probably," said Alice, "for whoever heard of highwaymen in broad daylight in these times? but what shall we do, gallop on or go back?"

"Let us go as far as yon rock," said her companion, "then it will merely look as if we had had our ride, and were returning in an ordinary way," then, seeing that Alice was momentarily becoming more nervous, she changed the conversation.

Presently, however, hearing that the riders in their rear had increased their pace, she glanced back and perceived that they had separated, so that when they should pass the young ladies they would have them in the centre. She made no comment, but casually asked Alice, if she would be able, in case of an attack, to turn her horse so suddenly as to give her adversary the slip and gallop back?

"Oh no!" cried Alice, alarmed. "I am sure I should only scream; but do you really think there is any danger?"

"Nonsense," said Isabella sharply; "pray do not let them know that we are talking about them at any rate."

There was silence, but Miss Berriton plainly saw that she must expect no help from Alice, nor was there chance of any from either direction: before them lay the waste of sand, on one side the cliffs, on the other the sea.

The horsemen were level with them, one on each hand, the third a little behind; they seemed to be passing. Alice was already smiling at their vain terror, when they turned their horses and attempted to seize each of the young ladies. Isabella was so ready that she almost wheeled her steed, and could she have caught Alice's rein might have escaped the first shock, when, as they were better mounted, they might have out-distanced their pursuers; but Alice, instead of coming nearer to her companion the instant they were attacked, had drawn off on the other side. Isabella failed in her effort, and before she could recover herself her arms were seized on either side, and her horse secured; seeing resistance was hopeless she ceased to struggle, and turned to see what fate had befallen her companion. Alice had made no attempt to defend herself, but alternately cried for help and assured her captor that she had nothing of value about her, receiving the very vague consolation that no harm was intended her. They were then hurried along the beach ever further from the town. Isabella uttered no

expostulation, but the moment she saw her guardian's watchfulness relaxed she made a desperate effort to free herself: it failed, and she was told that if she kept quiet no hurt would happen to her. On they rode for the space of twenty minutes, until they came to a part, where the cliffs subsided into dunes, or low sandy mounds covered with rushes, with at rare intervals a rude cart-track by which the labourers came down to the beach to gather wrack for the purpose of manure. At the entrance of one of these paths stood a closed carriage drawn by a pair of horses. A man was lounging idly beside it; he sprang up at the arrival of his accomplices, who halted, and the third, or middle rider, who had hitherto not spoken, said abruptly:

"Which of you young ladies is Miss Montague?"

There was no answer: Alice would not speak for fear, and Isabella was too generous to betray her. She looked sharply at the speaker, whose manner shewed that he was not of the extremely mean origin which his dress, which was ragged and dirty, seemed to indicate. His face was concealed by a large black silk handkerchief bound over his mouth.

"You do not answer?" he said. "Well, I can see for myself." He drew a paper out of his pocket and read: "Tall, with fair hair and blue eyes; looks about twenty;—methinks this description tallies with the young lady on my right. Miss Montague, we intend you no harm, but you must come with us. We seek no gold" (as Isabella interrupted, tending him her watch), "we are not thieves, though we look like them. You are in love with Captain Maximilian Thesiger," in spite of her terror a faint blush tinged Alice's cheek; "he is

desperately wounded, his very life depends upon his having good nursing, and who is so likely to give that to him as yourself? Could you understand me I would tell you of a great crisis that is approaching, but such words would fall unmeaningly upon your ears; I must speak to you according to your ability."

"That tale must be false," cried Isabella, for Alice was incapable of answering. "Captain Thesiger left his home in good health this morning."

"Nevertheless, he now lies insensible, and human knowledge cannot tell if he will ever regain consciousness. Look! is not this his?" and he held up a riding-whip, which both girls recognised as belonging to Max; "it is dyed with his blood."

"This is some foul plot," said Isabella. "Are you not afraid of attempting such a thing, which is sure to bring ruin upon all concerned in it?"

"I am speaking to Miss Berriton, and she knows that duty is paramount," was the reply. "Listen: either Miss Montague enters the carriage with us, and the moment it is out of sight Miss Berriton is set at liberty and can return home, and before night Major Kempthorn will be apprised of our destination; or refuse, and I take you both with me, and there are ways of bringing obstinate girls to reason."

"Do not threaten!" said Isabella with a flash; "every word you use will be reported against you. Alice," she continued, coming closer to Miss Montague, and speaking in French, "I fear it is true that Captain Thesiger has been wounded. Will you go with them to attend him? In two hours from the time I part with you the matter will be in the hands of the

police, and it can but be a question of a day before you are both in safety."

"No, no!" cried Alice in English. "I cannot go: it would kill me! how can you propose such a thing to me? it is enough to ruin my character for life."

"Do you think, Miss Montague," said Isabella, with flashing eyes, "that I should suggest anything to you that would in any way be dishonourable to you?"

"Come, young ladies," said the man, "make up your minds, one of you must come, or I will carry you both away, and then upon you will be any misfortune that happen; perchance even you may have Captain Thesiger's death to answer for."

Alice trembled; Isabella perceived this, and again spoke soothingly. "Alice, you love him; it cannot be for long."

"Really, if you are so anxious for it," said Alice petulantly, and half crying, "why do you not go yourself? you are stronger, and more fit for the fatigue than I am."

Isabella's cheeks grew scarlet. "It would be far worse for me than for you," she said in a very low tone.

"I do not see that," said Alice, turning from her.

The leader gave his men a sign; they approached Alice to force her from her horse; she screamed loudly. Isabella spoke. "Then, Miss Montague, if you will not go I will. You will set Miss Montague free?" she said to the men.

"That we promise," was the reply.

Isabella murmured to herself the arguments she had used to persuade Alice: "It cannot be for long —

twenty-four hours, and I shall be free—they shall not bend a daughter of the house of Berriton to do aught against her honour."

She heard one of the men say to the other, "We must have mistaken; this must be the one who loves him."

"No," she said, turning towards the speaker, with head erect. "No; I do it out of my friendship for them both."

Did Alice feel at that moment any compunction for her cowardly selfishness? She could see that the men, while they watched Isabella with respect and admiration, looked at her contemptuously. She hesitated; looked at the carriage, thought of the lonely drive, and her fear again was master.

"You do not very much mind?" she said, bending down, with her face wet with tears, towards Isabella, who had dismounted, and come to her side to take leave.

"No," she answered; and though her face was very pale it wore a look of grave resolution, far more really beautiful than any mere brilliancy of colouring or sweetness of expression. "Farewell, Alice; I hope we shall all meet safely within a few hours." She kissed her—the first time a caress had been exchanged between them—she then turned to get into the carriage, the man who had acted as spokesman respectfully helping her across the uneven sandy ground. The door was shut; the carriage drove away.

No opposition was made to Alice's departure as soon as it had disappeared behind a hillock. The leader desired one of his men to accompany her,

leading Miss Berriton's horse; then with the remainder of his band rode swiftly in the same direction the carriage had taken.

Alice returned along the beach with the most sore sense of humiliation that she had ever experienced in her life, though at present it was still mingled with, and deadened by, fears for her own safety. She sobbed and cried, and watched her companion suspiciously, though so little was she mistress of herself that it was only owing to his guiding that she got along without accident at all. At last they reached a break in the cliffs where an extremely rough road opened upon the beach; here Alice's guide, protector, gaoler, or whatever else he may be called, gave her to understand that they must part. He would take this road, which would lead by a short cut to Major Kempthorn's house, where he promised her to leave Isabella's horse; while she pursued the longer, but safer path by the beach. Without waiting her reply he left her, and she continued her ride, divided between the longing to call for assistance on the first person she should meet, and the fear of letting her story be known before she should be safe within the walls of her guardian's house. She, however, saw no one but two bare-footed fisherboys, who were not likely to afford her either comfort or aid, and she was nearly exhausted from fatigue and terror when she at last found herself outside the Major's gate.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Lost! Lost!
Seek her on the hill-side,
Seek her on the plain;
Search along the high road,
And go down each lane;
For the clouds are coming up,
And the night is falling fast;
There is fog in every vale,
There is death upon the blast."

"WHERE can those two girls be?" said Mrs. Kempthorn, as her party assembled for tea in the bright fire-lit drawing-room, and the two last started riders had not yet returned. "It is so imprudent. Even if Isabella had been in one of her wild moods I should have thought Alice would have had the sense to insist upon coming back; the fog was quite thick when the shutters were put up."

"I, for my part," answered the Major from his arm-chair, "am inclined to believe, that if there is any sense or prudence used at all this afternoon it will be on Isabella's, not Alice's side. But there they are," as a loud ring was heard at the bell. Grace went to meet them. The lamp outside the hall-door had not yet been lighted, so that she could not see very distinctly, but she heard the butler ask some questions, and she fancied there were sobs in answer.

"Has there been some accident, Miss Montague?" he inquired next.

Full of a strange foreboding Grace ran downstairs, exclaiming, "What is the matter, Barnes? where is Isabella, Alice?"

At this instant the groom came rushing from the back gate to say that Miss Berriton's horse was standing there without a rider. By this time the whole party were on their feet. Certainly Alice's appearance as she came into the hall confirmed the worst apprehensions. She was pale, with the marks of violent weeping; her habit was damp from the night air, and in answer to all questions as to what had happened she only clung with loud hysterical screams to Grace. Nothing could be learnt from her for the present, so, while his wife and daughters conveyed her upstairs, the Major hurried on to see what could be gained from the servants. From them he heard how that the back gate bell had been furiously rung; how the groom who was waiting for the horses had gone out; how that he had there found Miss Berriton's horse tied by the rein to one of the iron rails; the animal had evidently been a long way and was wearied, but there were no signs of violence about it. There was no clue as to the person who had brought it.

Sending a message for a policeman the Major returned to the drawing-room, where he found his wife still soothing Alice, while the united party were endeavouring to obtain from her some account of her adventures. Major Kempthorn took a very much briefer way of gaining information.

"Alice Montague," he said, "be kind enough to

tell me when, where, and in what condition you parted with Miss Berriton?"

"My dear, be gentle with her," exclaimed his wife; but her guardian's severity had happily the effect of a tonic upon Alice's nerves, and, gulping down her last sobs, she began to give an account of the ride, as clear as could be expected from her having really nearly made herself ill by crying so long, and the fear of the blame that might be attached to her conduct. Several of the younger ones began to cry when they heard of Max being wounded, and Mrs. Kempthorn asked if she were quite certain that it was his whip?

"There was no doubt about it," she answered; "it was the one he always used, with his name on the handle."

"And pray why did not you go to nurse Captain Thesiger instead of Isabella Berriton?" demanded the Major.

"Oh! uncle, I could not; it would have killed me, I am not strong enough. Besides, how did we know it was not a hoax?" pleaded Alice.

"Alice, I am ashamed of you; you might easily have been deceived by such a story, but there is no excuse for your pushing the risk off upon another."

Alice hung her head.

"What were the men like who attacked you?" pursued the Major.

"Oh! uncle, I cannot tell; how could I be expected to look at them at such a moment?"

"If you will not tell me you shall tell the inspector of police, who will be here soon."

Alice trembled, but replied: "Two were short, and

one rather tall; I could not see their faces; they were dressed shabbily. The two short were on brown, the taller on a white horse."

"Oh!—Barnes, go down to Inspector Robinson and say that I wish to speak to him directly on a matter of the most urgent importance. Herbert, go to the barracks and tell this story to Captain Forrester, desire him to have his and Max's companies to be out at a moment's notice, and ask him to come up here. You may well cry, Alice; you have done enough mischief for one day."

He strode from the apartment. His wife led Alice upstairs followed by the girls, so that when the Major returned to the drawing-room, after his conversation with the policeman whom the groom had summoned, he found Grace there alone, trying to work though her tears were falling fast.

"Do you think, father," she said, "that Max is so very ill?"

"No, my dear," he answered; "I believe it is bad enough, but I do not at all think he is so near dying as Alice's story would make out.—Oh!" he added, as if to himself, "if that girl had only one spark of common sense or generous self-forgetfulness, if even half the passion that she pretended to this morning, how different things would now be."

"Why, father," asked Grace timidly, "is it so much worse for Isabella to have gone than it would have been for Alice? she has so much more courage, and would know so much better what to do for Max if he were really ill."

"Listen, Grace," said her father gravely: "many years ago the Berritons committed a great injustice;

there was no redress for the wronged parties at the time, but they swore vengeance, and were only restrained from seeking it by the most violent means by the fact that the Berritons died, one after another in quick succession, and they thought that the judgment of heaven was doing the work for them. So much I have always known, as legends of a family to which I am distantly connected. Isabella is, as you know, the last of her race; if she dies without children there will be none on whom the vengeance can fall. Now I believe, from certain anonymous letters I have received, warning me, and threatening me as to my conduct towards Isabella, that though nearly two-thirds of a century have passed since the supposed date of the injustice there are still representatives of those to whom the wrong was done, and from the tone of the letters I imagine they fear Isabella's becoming attached to Max, and putting all things together, I suspect that they have by some means become possessed of his person, and that they desired so to involve Alice's fate with his that a union between them would become inevitable; thus at the worst they would only have effected what, without their interference, is very likely to come to pass; but when they find they have Isabella in their power I have great fear they may take a shorter and readier method of ridding themselves of any danger of her marrying and continuing the line."

"Murder her!" cried Grace, horrified. "Papa, it is impossible; in these days—the police."

"The sea is near at hand," said the Major in a gloomy tone, "and it will be some hours before we can get upon their track. But not a word of this,

Grace," he added, laying a firm hand upon her arm; "if I am mistaken never a syllable must be breathed; if I am right the whole world will know soon enough."

Barnes now announced the inspector of police and Captain Forrester, who, having both started immediately on the receipt of his message, arrived together. The inspector, a very intelligent man, at once arranged for the measures to be taken. From the account Miss Montague, who was again closely questioned, gave, he felt almost certain as to the spot where she parted from her companion, and also in what direction the carriage must have gone for some distance. He said he would send up men to examine the ground, when he had little doubt but that the track of the wheels, etc., would guide them further. He also would telegraph to several stations along the coast, and inland, so that should persons at all answering to the description attempt to travel by sea or by land they might be stopped. He strongly advised that the military should be called out, but should wait for the report of the police. His own suspicion pointed towards a marshy tract, some ten miles beyond the place where it was imagined the young ladies must have parted, and where desperate characters were known formerly to have resorted; and he assured Captain Forrester that if nothing was heard by daybreak he should be glad of the assistance of his soldiers to search this district. With this opinion, Major Kempthorn concurring, the Captain was obliged to be content, though inwardly fuming with impatience at the obstacles thrown in the way of his making a grand battue through the country round for his missing friend.

The inspector then departed to start his various messengers, and the gentlemen walked down to Max's lodgings to see if any information could be gained there; however, Captain Thesiger had left no message as to where he was going, no letters were to be forwarded, and he had said he should not be gone long.

"Then there is nothing for it but to wait for the return of the police," said the Major, shaking hands with his companion. "You had better let your men go to their quarters, and rest yourself, for you do not know how early you may be called up."

"Resting is out of the question with Thesiger in such danger," replied the Captain, who, some years older than Max, was exceedingly attached to his gallant young fellow-officer. He invited Herbert to accompany him to his quarters, which the latter gladly agreeing to do, the Major returned home alone.

He made his way straight to Alice's room, where he found her wrapt in a dressing-gown, taking some supper, and telling the story for the twentieth time to Florence, who was keeping her company. Alice's cheeks were flushed, and her eyes red and swollen; but she seemed entirely to have recovered her usual spirits, and was chattering away in her ordinary way.

"Good night, Alice," said the Major, gravely.

"Good night," she answered, starting up. "Uncle, you are not angry with me?"

"No," he replied in the same tone; "but let this be a grave warning to you, Alice, against giving way to temper when you are restrained in any fancy."

He kissed her and left the room. He could say no more, but as he closed the door he heaved a deep

sigh. Would anything short of overwhelming sorrow ever impress that light mind off which every grave feeling vanished like water off a duck's back? Perhaps such a sorrow was now hanging over Alice. He hastily put away the thought and went to the drawing-room, where Grace was still in solitude.

"Any news?" she asked.

"No," he answered; "but—" A loud peal at the bell interrupted him. They both hurried to the door; a stranger's voice was asking for the Major, and the next moment Barnes announced Mr. Thornby, the Major's old friend, with whom he had transacted his business at Carniebrow Hall, and at the same time handed his master a note.

CHAPTER XV.

"The stranger comes from a far distant land,
His manner is grave and cold;
But yet give heed unto his tale,
For he is sent by a trusty hand."

"WHAT can bring you here at this time?" exclaimed Major Kempthorn, even while heartily shaking the hand of his guest, "you are the last person I expected to see to-night."

"Then you knew nothing about the summons?"

"No; what summons? Explain yourself."

"I received a letter yesterday morning, signed R. W., requesting me in imperative terms at once to repair to the house of my friend, H. K. at M., on important business concerning I. B. The post-mark was London, the date three days ago. Now, these initials correspond to your own and those of your ward, Miss Berriton, and as I was about to take a holiday I resolved to come to you. If the summons did concern you I should be on the spot; if, as I believe, it is only a trick, well then, I want to see you on other matters; but if I at all inconvenience you say so, and I will spend the night at the inn. I have already made inquiries as to the best in the place."

"No, no; stay with us," said the Major warmly; "there is no one I shall be more thankful to see under present circumstances."

"Let it be so; and now tell me how affairs stand with you," said the lawyer, whose quick eye had noticed the signs of grief on Grace's face, and her father's hurried embarrassment. "Your servants opened the door as if they expected some one, which led me to imagine that the summons had, after all, somehow emanated from you."

"We are in great distress and perplexity," replied the Major. "Draw your chair to the fire, and I will tell you about it. Grace, go and order some dinner for Mr. Thornby."

"Not so," said his guest; "I will partake of supper, or whatever your next meal is."

"But papa has had no dinner, he ought to eat something," said Grace.

"Very well, then, on those conditions; but I will have no one put out merely on my account," said the lawyer. "Is that your eldest daughter, Kempthorn?" he added, as she left the room.

He answered in the affirmative.

"Very like you at the same age," said his friend. "But now let us hear your story."

The Major accordingly gave a full account of what had lately happened, together with his fears and apprehensions, arising from the anonymous letters he had received, which all bore the same London district mark, and were evidently by the same hand as that of the writer of the note which had so happily brought Mr. Thornby to his friend's house, from which circumstance the lawyer argued no harm could be intended to Miss Berriton.

"How does Captain Thesiger come to be mixed up with all this?" was his next question.

Major Kempthorn gave him a history of who Max was, and also told him all that he knew of his strange half-mad relation, Ruth Wybeer.

"R. W.," said the lawyer thoughtfully; then jumping at a conclusion he declared that so far from believing that any injury would be offered to Isabella by revengeful persecutors of her name, he felt convinced that the whole thing was only a plot of the old crack-brained lady, who, under an appearance of mystery, hid matchmaking designs, and that she was only desirous of obtaining a wealthy wife for her nephew.

"Very unnecessary care," said the soldier, passing his arm round Grace, who had just returned; "Max is too great a favourite not to be able to marry whom he likes."

"Depend upon it," laughed the lawyer, "Miss Berriton will return to you under another authority than your own. But, I say, Kempthorn, what is that note? from the look of it I should imagine that it comes from the same hand as all the others. I know that flourish."

"Why, where did it come from? I never saw it before."

"Barnes brought it in, papa," said Grace, "when Mr. Thornby came."

The Major broke the seal of the letter, which bore the impress of a blank shield, and read:

"SIR,

"Repeatedly as you have been warned, both by writing and by word of mouth, there is no making you keep the strictly upright and prudent path which

alone will lead to happiness for yourself and safety for those committed to your care by that most sacred of all things, a man's last will. ("I wish it were always so," put in Mr. Thornby.) At last, in despair of your following good advice, I have taken the matter into my own hands, the more particularly as a discovery has been made which will, by doing full justice to the oppressed, relieve the innocent descendant of a guilty house from the weight of a crime committed by her ancestors. This plan was frustrated by the obstinacy of your ward, Alice Montague (obstinacy, by the way, which well shows who has had the bringing up of her). If even now you will repent, and endeavour to repair the evil that you have done, come with Miss Montague and Mr. Thornby (who by this time will be at your house, and who, though he belongs to a profession eminent for its dishonesty, has some common sense) to the village of Buckley, in the marsh, where you will find a guide, and the means of taking you further; but attempt no treachery, bring no disguised policeman with you, give up all connection with the minions of the law and of the War Office, or else, on the word of one who has never yet failed in her blow, and who never yet was deceived, you shall bitterly rue it.

"Ruth Wybeer.

"P.S.—It may give you some satisfaction to know that your young officer, Maximilian Thesiger, is not dangerously hurt; that he is so at all he has to thank his own foolhardiness and want of attention to the commonest maxims of reason."

"Have we gone back a couple of centuries? or are we in some eastern country, where a despotic princess commands her humble slaves?" said Major Kempthorn when he had concluded this extraordinary epistle.

The lawyer chuckled. "She is a queer lady," he said, "but as I told you, her purpose is not bloody towards Miss Berriton."

"What would you advise?" said his friend in great perplexity. "Show this letter to the police, and let them go upon the clue it gives? Inspector Robinson said well that the marsh is a suspected place, or——"

"My dear Kempthorn," interrupted the lawyer, "I make it a rule never to give advice upon an empty stomach; it is now some hours since I breakfasted, and your servant has twice announced that dinner is on the table; we will, if you please, take our meal before further discussing this question. Miss Grace will be discreet and keep her own counsel; the less this is talked of the better."

During dinner they conversed on indifferent subjects, and it was only when the wine was placed before them and the servants had withdrawn that the lawyer said, "Is your Inspector Robinson a prudent, sensible fellow?"

"Very much so; he is one of the most respectable men in the town."

"Of course, of course; but would he hold his tongue, give as much help as was required, and ask no questions?"

"I do not see exactly what you mean," said the Major. "I have no doubt that if I put this letter into his hands he would, from the information it gives, within 24 hours have both our young people in safety."

"Yes, yes; but would he support us if needed, and if the work was done without his help not inquire how it was effected?"

"You mean if we were to take a disguised constable with us to this rendezvous, and by that means force them to yield?"

"No; I mean to go in all good faith, accompany her messenger to whatever place he may choose to guide us, and try what we can do that way."

"Very doubtful and dangerous," said the Major; "besides, would it not be conniving at a crime?"

"My dear Kempthorn, if you will not be guided you will infallibly knock your head against a wall. In the first place, I do not think they will venture to attack two able-bodied men like yourself and me; in the second, I do not see the justice of bringing before the magistrate a woman who, from her own letter and from all we have heard of her and her acts, is more fit for a lunatic asylum than for a prison."

"I believe there is more knavery than madness in this," said the Major, taking up the letter with a discontented air.

"Perhaps you know more about the matter than I do," said the lawyer; "but such is my advice, founded upon my honest conviction."

There was a pause; then the Major said, "I believe, Thornby, you are right; and I think Robinson is a man who would help in such a project. Shall I send for him?"

"No; leave your messengers to give in their reports. If they bring no news (as I rather hope will happen, for I should like to see this lady who does me the honour

to say, that though I am of a 'profession eminent for their dishonesty' I have some few grains of common sense) I will speak to this Robinson and lay my plans before him; depend upon it that is the best."

"I suppose so," sighed Major Kempthorn; "and in the mean time poor Isabella must be left to their mercy."

"Not so, not so," said the lawyer; "they will be kind to her, I am convinced of that; and really I should not be sorry if the result were an engagement between her and this young Thesiger, if it were merely as a meet punishment for Alice, who, with all due respect to you, I consider as not a little of a coquet."

"Isabella hates Max," said the guardian.

"I never believe in such violent aversions between beautiful young ladies and amiable and estimable young men, with whom they are constantly meeting; indifference is a much safer frame of mind. I once knew a charming youthful widow. She had married, to please her father, a man much older than herself, somewhat of a screw, therefore she could not be expected to grieve immoderately when he died and left her all his money; at least so thought all her acquaintance, among them a most gentlemanly, accomplished man about thirty. The widow was then twenty-four. In due time he began to woo her. She was furious, at any rate she said she was; she consulted me, I being an executor of her late husband's will; she said she hated him, that she thought respect for her dead husband might have put her under shelter from such attacks, and she wrathfully drew her crape around her.

"'Madam,' I replied, 'there is no impropriety in Mr. ——'s conduct. No one could blame you for changing your condition; you have no ties, no duties to keep you as you are, and I assure you it would be praiseworthy rather than otherwise to seek new interests; but,' I added, as she seemed preparing to go, 'at any rate, madam, let me beg of you not to be so violent against him: hating him, he must necessarily occupy much of your thoughts, and believe me, madam, you will end by loving him.' I tell you she left my house without deigning me another word."

"I am not surprised," said the Major; "it was a most impertinent thing to say."

"Well, but hear the sequel," said Mr. Thornby with a peculiar smile, and filling his glass with claret he resumed: "For three months I neither heard from her nor saw her, and only vague rumours from time to time reached my ears. At last I happened to be at an evening party. On a sofa at the far end of the room who should I see but my charming widow, more beautiful than ever, in the softest of grey silk dresses, with an elegant little lace cap upon her head. She was talking with animation to the aforesaid disagreeable gentleman, who was leaning over the back of a chair beside her; no doubt he had seen and acknowledged the error of his ways, and they now conversed with all the amiable freedom of two well-informed, sensible people. As the cause of offence was now removed I thought that I too might receive pardon for my impertinence, and went to pay my respects to the widow, and to congratulate her on looking so well. She received me graciously, and invited me to

a seat beside her on the sofa. After a few minutes' conversation the gentleman said very frankly, 'Mr. Thornby, I am particularly glad to see you this evening, for I want to give you an invitation; I forthwith bid you to my wedding.' Here, then, was the explanation of the peace: he had transferred his admiration to another object; the widow was satisfied with his friendship, and left his warmer affections to a rival. I looked towards her; she had raised her handkerchief to her lips, but there was the most roguish smile in her eyes that I ever saw on woman's face. I generously forbore saying, 'I told you so;' but I suppose my face must have shown it, for springing up she passed me, and went to speak to a friend at some distance. They are now one of the happiest couples I ever met with, and I never heard that any one ever reproached her for want of respect or affection for the memory of her first husband; so I say, believe in indifference, but never in violent dislike."

"A good story, and a good moral," said the Major laughing, as he rose, for it was now late, to conduct his guest to his chamber. He ordered Barnes to keep up all the earlier part of the night, after which he would himself keep guard in case any messenger should come from Robinson.

Early morning, before it was light, brought the inspector and Captain Forrester, but no news. The wind, which had risen as soon as the tide began to flow, had obliterated the marks of the horses and carriage; once they thought they had come on the track in a deep muddy lane, but it proved to be only the rut caused by the wheel of a large waggon.

Captain Forrester was vehement in his desire to have out the military, declaring that they would be of more good than all the policemen put together. The inspector preached patience, and reiterated his promise, that if only time were allowed all would be discovered. Mr. Thornby drew the inspector aside to unfold to him his plan, while the Major endeavoured to calm his excited fellow-officer, by telling him so much of what they knew and suspected as was necessary to persuade him of the necessity of caution; but before he had brought him to any degree of compliance Inspector Robinson and Mr. Thornby perfectly understood one another, and were ready to explain their ideas to their companions.

It was agreed that the Major, Mr. Thornby, and Barnes should go to the rendezvous, and should accompany the messenger wherever he might lead. If all was right they would send back Barnes to say so to their friends; should, however, the butler not appear within twenty-four hours the police should proceed to the village where the gentlemen were to meet their guide, and where doubtless they would be able to obtain information that would permit them to follow the track further.

"If I might be allowed to say so, sir," remarked the inspector, "this plan will be better in every respect, for it gives you a chance of getting them back without any further stir, and it would be very disagreeable to Miss Berriton to have her name before the public."

Mr. Thornby agreed in this opinion, and if the two soldiers looked as if they considered it a cheating of justice they did not oppose the gentlemen of the law,

Captain Forrester only remarking: "Well, then, Major, if you are not heard of within twenty-four hours, not only Thesiger's company and mine, but the whole regiment, nay, all the troops quartered here, shall turn out to search for you."

"I hope such extreme measures may not be necessary," said the lawyer, rubbing his hands.

"I must go now," said Forrester, "or I shall not be in time for drill. I shall have work enough with Thesiger's men, I can see; they were with me before I started to ask if anything had been heard of their captain. I have kept Herbert," he continued, "I think he is better with me than up here."

There was something so peculiar in the tone in which he pronounced these last words that the Major followed him to the door to ask if he meant anything particular by them.

"Only," he replied, "Herbert has been going on about his jealousy of Max, and other nonsense of that sort, and I have gathered that you do not wish him to declare his feelings, so I judged he would do more good with me than worrying the ladies."

"Right; many thanks," said the Major, and returned to the dining-room, where Mr. Thornby greeted him with the inquiry as to whether he meant to obey their extraordinary citer so far as to take Alice Montague with them?

"I think not," he said, looking towards the inspector, who replied respectfully but decidedly:

"I should say sir, no; you may have some disagreeable scenes to go through, and the young lady does not seem very strong."

"I am sure she is an encumbrance I am only too glad to be quit of," muttered Mr. Thornby.

"And," said the Major, "if I see any necessity for her coming she can return with Barnes; my son can accompany her too, for extra security."

Then having given Mrs. Kempthorn all the information they possessed, and communicated to her their plans, they took leave of her and Grace, promising them news as soon as they could, recommending them to keep to the house and to let as little of the story be known as possible. They then started, the lawyer in high spirits, regarding success as certain; the soldier not quite so sanguine, but still more hopeful than he had hitherto been. It will, however, be seen that the good gentlemen had made one very important mistake as to the motives which had prompted the attack upon the young ladies.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Moon is in her summer glow,
But hoarse and high the breezes blow,
And, racking o'er her face, the cloud
Varies the tincture of her shroud;

. . . . . .

When conscience, with remorse and fear,
Goads sleeping Fancy's wild career.
Her light seems now the blush of shame,
Seems now fierce anger's darker flame,
Shifting that shade, to come and go,
Like apprehension's hurried glow;
Then sorrow's livery dims the air,
And dies in darkness, like despair."—'Rokeby.'

We hinted at the end of the last chapter that Major Kempthorn and his friend of the law had erred in their suppositions as to the reason of the unexpected assault on the two girls; but to make this clear it is necessary to take our narrative back to the evening of the dance, when it will be remembered Max Thesiger, at the moment that Alice Montague was conducted back to the house by her guardian, had an interview with his relation, Miss Wybeer, and that as soon as she had pronounced her last words, full of mysterious warning and threatening to her nephew, she had started at the full speed of her horses along the lane. This mad pace she maintained for some distance on the main road, then left it to pursue a cross turning, which led her to

what was called "the moor," a long, low range of hills partly occupied by pasturage, partly covered with heath.

Still she kept on her course without once slackening speed, her fiery little horses urged rather by her rein than her whip, which lay idle across her knee. The wind whistled round her, the ascent grew steeper, but still she paused not; the light carriage swayed from side to side; its only other occupant besides the driver, a large black cat curled upon the seat opposite to her, seemed to find some difficulty in maintaining its balance, and at last in despair, springing on to its mistress's knee, it steadied itself by digging its sharp claws into her cloak. The lady, however, paid no attention. Her lips were compressed, and her eyes fixed upon her horses' ears as if she had no other aim than that of getting over the ground as quickly as possible; nevertheless, her emotions were very various, to judge by her changing expression, heightened by the ever-altering light of the moon, which was now intensely bright and soft, now dimmed by a passing cloud, now altogether darkened. It was at one of these moments, when the wind came damp and cold with the mists that grew thicker as she drove higher, that the lady began to talk to herself in a low excited tone:

"Madness!—the most utter madness! He, the last of his race, to throw away the chance that is given him of healing the breach, of avenging the oppressed, of freeing the innocent from the curse of their father's sins; he so far to forget his high destiny as to listen to the dictates of passion! Sister, it is enough!—thy untimely death has been fully avenged!—rest contented! Must yet another victim be added to the long

list? Canst thou not rest quiet in thy grave? While *they* lived none was more implacable than I, but I *cannot* visit their guilt upon their spotless descendant."

The moon shining through the hazy edge of a cloud showed her face almost soft; but suddenly it assumed a darker shade, as she exclaimed with a bitter laugh:

"Let him marry her! let him see what will come then! The avenger is by his side; one of that race still walks the earth; and when did a Berriton ever stoop to forgive? when did one of that proud family pass by an injury? Three times has their blood mingled with ours; I feel it now throb in my veins, and ever for woe; but that which is past will pale before that which is to come. She seems quiet and reserved now, but *that* lurks in her blood that when aroused better face the lion in his den than her in her madness. He will be hurled to the bottom with the guilty object for the sake of whom he has forgotten truth and honour, despised warning and prudence."

The moon was completely obscured, and, fully occupied with the difficulties of the road, she paused in her soliloquy until she had reached the summit of the hill, and she was driving along a short piece of level ground when she resumed in a milder tone:

"And yet she is beautiful as an angel. What was there in her that touched my stony heart, dried up with watching by the dead? As she stood, and I heard the sweet tones of her voice, I felt that I could have pardoned him for loving her; I, who have never pardoned any one since the day that my sister's child fled from me and left me alone."

The moon had now passed through the cloud, and

rode triumphant in mid-heaven, silvering with her ray the dark masses behind her, as if in pardon for the injury they had tried to do her in obscuring her light. Ruth Wybeer gazed at the sky, and her voice assumed a gentler, dreamy accent:

"Why should I, after all, seek for vengeance? I am the only one left who knows the tale; when I die all will be forgotten. Why longer disturb the peace of those who are dead, the truest rest granted to man, that of the grave?"

Her carriage, proceeding at a walk, had entered the shadow of an overhanging bank. As if this gloom had a corresponding effect upon the lady's spirit, she suddenly stamped her foot, urged her horses furiously down the steep incline and up the opposite hill, almost shouting:

"I *forgive!* — away, false fiend! — tempt me no longer! Can I forget the wife driven from her husband's roof? the babe thrown out to perish in the cold? Would that I had that girl in my power I would end at once, by her death, the long line of the oppressors, and offer a fitting victim to the memory of the injured! God help me!" she cried, as with a throb of the sharpest agony, checking her horses upon the ridge of the hill she had been so madly climbing. "How deceitful is human nature! Have I not been imagining that I desired to heal the wound, and by joining their hands to blot out memory of the past? and have I only been breathing vengeance, murderous vengeance? I blame him for yielding to his passion! I, who cannot control my own wild will!—God forgive me!" and sinking on her knees at the bottom of the

carriage she burst into a flood of tears; this woman, neither loving nor beloved, whose heart had been buried fifty years before in the grave of her only sister.

She wept till she was exhausted; then resuming her seat she gathered up her reins. Her well-trained little horses had stood perfectly still, only turning their heads towards her and neighing as if wondering at the unusual delay. She drew her cloak round her as if she felt chilly, and with sobs still heaving her breast, drove slowly in the direction from which she had come.

So far, however, had her madness impelled her course astray, that morning was breaking before she entered her own gates; and her horses, high-mettled though they were, when they stopped at the hall door looked as if they could not move a step further. A groom came forward, and, without comment on the hour or the condition of the animals, assisted his mistress to alight, and then led the vehicle away towards the stables; while the lady, admitting herself by a latchkey, crossed the silent hall and mounted the staircase, both of which were illuminated by a large lamp placed against the wall. She entered a small chamber on the first floor; it looked cold in the dim morning light entering by the uncurtained windows. She drew out her watch, and having with difficulty made out the hour, 5·30, she sat down by the window, all dressed in her wraps as she was, apparently with the intention of waiting until some more reasonable time before arousing her household.

But, quiet as had been her entrance, some one had

been watching for her, and she had not been seated five minutes before the same old servant appeared whom we have described on a former occasion, when Max Thesiger went to visit his relation at the sea-town of V—.

"You are late home, madam," he said, with a more respectful tone than we heard him use before.

"Yes; I have travelled far, and am weary," she replied.

"Then, madam, you must rest," said the domestic.

"*Rest!*" she repeated, with a little impatient movement. "What rest is there but that of the tomb?"

"Yet, madam," persisted the man, "your work is not done; you must not seek that rest."

"You are right, Pedro," she said in a low, worn-out tone; "and yet I think sometimes that the curse of heaven rests upon me—nothing I put my hand to prospers—my errand has been a profitless one, Pedro."

"But, madam," he replied, "I have not been idle during your absence; I have news for you."

"News!" cried the old lady, turning eagerly; "tell it."

"Not, madam, till you are refreshed," he said; "it would harm you to hear it now."

Ruth Wybeer knew of old that while there was not a thing that Pedro would not do for her and at her command, when her health was in question he was obdurate, and that on such occasions she found him as sullen as the outer world did at ordinary times, she therefore replied: "You are right, Pedro; I am exhausted. No one is up but yourself, I suppose?"

"No one, madam."

"Then bring me a cup of coffee, and when I have drunk it I will hear your news."

Pedro left the room; his mistress retired to her bed-chamber, and when he returned he found her seated by the table divested of her cloak and bonnet, wearing a close-fitting black satin dress, with a white linen cap bordered with lace concealing her hair. She was resting her head on her hand, and her face wore an expression of the deepest sadness; perhaps this look, perhaps her garb suggested a likeness to some holy hermitess of old, watching and waiting, after all she loved on earth had been taken from her, until her turn too should come. A strange comparison, the reader will think, for this woman whom he has probably been regarding as a sort of virago. Yes; but if when aroused she was as one possessed, in her hours of melancholy (and they were many) and in her patient faith to those long dead she was little akin to our bustling, never-reposing nineteenth century.

In silence Pedro placed the coffee before her, and in silence she partook of it, her attendant standing near her chair; at length, perceiving that she was calmer, he asked how she had sped during her journey.

"Badly, most badly, Pedro," she replied, mournfully; "not only have I had no success, but I have seen that which would be enough to blast almost complete certainty in the other object of my quest. That misguided young man!—I fear nothing can save him!"

She then related what she had seen in Major Kempthorn's garden. Pedro shook his head.

"It is ill," he said, "it is ill; he ought to follow your advice."

Among Pedro's peculiarities was that of always regarding his mistress as being right, and the rest of the world wrong. She was to him an absolute sovereign with all the infallibility of a pope. Whatever had been Max Thesiger's inclinations or desires, however advisable one match, however undesirable another, had Miss Wybeer decided for the second, Pedro would have considered her nephew as wilfully blind to his duty had he disregarded her and chosen for himself.

"It must be put a stop to," continued Ruth Wybeer, "or it will bring ruin on all concerned. But what is your news?"

"To-morrow I shall have in my hands," said Pedro dogmatically, "the dying deposition of Burkly, who helped your unhappy niece when she left your house. I had a letter from Mr. Watson, the clergyman of the parish where he resided, saying that such a deposition had been made and properly attested by a magistrate, and addressed to my hand, and inquiring if I could give certain information that I was the person for whom it was intended. I filled up a paper, to which I on my part obtained the signature of a magistrate, and sent it to him. He wrote me word that it was enough and that he would forward me the papers. Is not this good news?"

Had Pedro been giving evidence on a subject indifferent to him his words could not have been more precise, his tone more measured; but no one seeing the changes of his face, the suppressed eagerness with which he watched his mistress, could for one moment

have imagined otherwise than that this manner was assumed to restrain the lady, whose slight frame was quivering with agitation.

"Then is Burkly dead?" she asked.

"Even so, madam; one mystery will be cleared up now."

"My niece is dead though, Pedro," said the old lady with mournful certainty; "that night that I heard her voice upon the wind she breathed her last."

"She may have left children," said Pedro.

"She may; and they should know nothing of the old feud; for them it ought to be closed. Oh! what chance that boy has, and he will lose it! He stands between the past and the present, the living and the dead; he might be a peacemaker, he might heal the old breach, and he will lose it all toying with that girl."

"Can nothing be done, madam?" said Pedro; "if you were to summon him to you, reason with him?"

"I have tried reasoning, explanation, threatening; nothing will avail. Perhaps I might yet bring him to his senses," she added musingly. "Yes; I will have him here, tell him more of our family history; he may yet listen before it is too late. What is the hour?"

"Six has struck some time," replied Pedro.

"Then it is not too early to send a message. Order the groom to saddle a horse to ride over to M— directly. Then you with some others must go to the White Cross turning beyond Buckly in the Marsh—that boy must not know our whereabouts. Bring me paper, ink—quick."

Pedro fetched her what she required and then went to give the necessary orders. By the time the horse was saddled the note was ready, and Ruth Wybeer sat down with a pink spot burning on either cheek to await the result of her new arrangements.

CHAPTER XVII.

"The morn rose fair and calm,
And nature seemed to smile;
On everything she shed her balm,
On all but restless man."

MAX THESIGER rose on the morning after Major Kempthorn's dance out of humour with himself and every one else; he was angry with the Major for taking Alice away; he was discontented with himself for being so excited; but above all was he wrathful with his aunt, Ruth Wybeer. What made her interfere with her ill-omened prophecies? He was willing to pay her every respect, show her every kindness in his power; but she had no right to meddle, and this he would show her by going on in spite of her;—but still it was strange that madness and reason, superstition and clear common sense, Ruth Wybeer and Major Kempthorn should unite to oppose his marrying Alice Montague. The Major gave a good reason for what he did—he did not think they were suited for one another, but he was willing to own that he might be mistaken, and that they might be theirselves the best judges of their wishes; but Ruth Wybeer, there was no arguing with her, for she gave no explanation, said nothing that could be laid hold of, but only imperiously desired him to leave off a courtship in which he felt

his happiness was nearly involved. No; Max would hold on his own way.

But why did Miss Berriton always look so handsome in black silk? and why was it that he took a pleasure in talking to her? Of course because he was the only one among her acquaintance in whom she was forced to acknowledge a superior; but then, Max ought to be thinking how a pair of soft blue eyes lit up at his presence, not how flashing dark ones bent before his glance.

Thus it was in a very snappish mood that he entered his sitting-room, where he rang for his breakfast at a most unreasonable hour, turned poor puss off the arm-chair, where she was seeking to make up for the want of warmth from the newly-lighted fire, and finally sat down to tea made from water that had never boiled, uncooked toast, and half-raw eggs.

He was partaking of these not savoury viands when his landlady entered with a note.

"Any answer?" said the Captain, as he took this welcome diversion to his thoughts.

"No," she replied.

He opened and read: "Nephew, I must see you at once upon important business. Start as soon as you conveniently can upon receipt of this. My servant with the carriage will meet you at the White Cross turning beyond Buckly in the Marsh.—Ruth Wybeer.

"For Captain Maximilian Thesiger."

This epistle had the happy effect of dispelling Max's ill-humour, for immediately on reading it he burst out laughing. "A truly lordly note," he said half aloud; "but I will go, it will serve all purposes—the Major

will be glad to be rid of me for a day or two; my aunt will be mollified by my prompt attention to her summons, and I may be able to talk her into viewing with a less severe eye my conversation with poor Alice last night, which I have no doubt she is now regarding in the light of a most scandalous proceeding. He ordered his horse to be saddled, dashed off his note to the Major, and then rode down to the Colonel's house, with whom, fortunately, he was a great favourite, and who therefore made no objection to being disturbed so early in the morning (it was now only eight o'clock), and who not only granted him the desired leave, but also, to save his time, promised to find some one to do his work; and the Captain set off at a round trot for Buckly in the Marsh, where he arrived about eleven.

Buckly had formerly been noted as a smuggling village, and now did not bear a good name, though why it should retain this bad character it was difficult to say, for a more sleepy, dead-alive place than it looked when Captain Thesiger rode through it on this sunshiny, hazy November morning it would be almost impossible to find. The men were all away, either fishing or labouring in the fields, for Buckly in the Marsh united the characteristics of a fishing and an agricultural parish. The cottages, each neatly thatched and painted yellow, standing in its trim little garden, surrounded by black palings, reminded the traveller of a Dutch village, and the illusion was borne out by the perfect stillness that reigned everywhere. Max saw no one, heard no sound but the hum of children's voices as he passed the school-house until he arrived at the

inn where he proposed to put up his horse. He was well known to the landlord of the sign of the Duke's Head, where he had on more than one occasion spent several days at a time with friends, for the Marsh by no means bore out its name by being a swamp; many parts of it formed rich pasturage; the fields, however, by the cuttings for the water and the willow trees that grew along their edges, showing what they would be if left to nature.

These meadows were a pleasing surprise to those who had formed their idea of the scenery of the neighbourhood from the steep cliffs that led down to the sea, or from the high heathy ground behind the town; and Buckly was much frequented in the summer time by artists, who found in the cattle grazing in the luxuriant fields fitting originals for those rural landscapes so often to be seen in our exhibitions.

The host of the sign of the Duke's Head while taking Max's horse received his instructions. He was going on, he said, to see a relation on business; perhaps he might be back that same afternoon, in which case he would sleep there; perhaps not for a couple of days. Until his return, whenever that might be, he left his horse in the care of mine host, which charge that worthy man of course willingly undertook. He offered the guest luncheon, which proposal Max, whose breakfast had been none of the heaviest, was glad to accept. At length refreshed he again set out, this time on foot, for the White Cross turning, about a mile from Buckly, deeper in the marsh. When he arrived in sight of the turning he at first perceived neither carriage nor servant.

"Can that old woman have tricked me?" he thought. "I wish now I had ridden."

Round the corner, however, he found the vehicle that had been sent to meet him, a small closed carriage drawn by a pair of horses. Three men were standing near it: the coachman; another man, whom he recognised as the servant who had opened the door to him when he had visited his aunt at V——; the third was a rustic-looking fellow, probably a gossiping acquaintance. This view was confirmed when on his approach the man moved away and resumed his work at the hedge.

Pedro touched his hat to the Captain, and held open the carriage door for him.

"Why, my good friend," said Max, laughing, "you surely do not expect me to drive like that?" for not only were both blank windows up, but the front glasses were carefully closed with shutters.

"Such were my mistress's orders," said Pedro.

"That cannot be; there must be some mistake," said the Captain. "Miss Wybeer may have feared the dust when the carriage was empty, but she cannot intend me to travel in that way. So come, raise the shutters, or I will do so myself."

"That is easier said than done," answered Pedro rather sullenly and insolently.

And Max indeed perceived that in addition to the usual fastenings the windows were secured with iron bolts. This made him the more determined to have them opened, and though still temperately he spoke with more decision.

"Come, undo those bolts, directly. If you persist in

keeping them fastened I shall walk back to Buckly and fetch my horse."

"That also you will not find so easy to do," said Pedro.

Max looked round, but only saw the hedger, whose work had now taken him to some little distance from them.

"You have been drinking, sirrah," he said very sharply. "Move from that door directly. Coachman, help me undo the bolts."

"My orders were to obey *him*," said the coachman with a stupid grin.

"And," continued Pedro, "you are not yet in possession of your aunt's fortune and master of her servants, whatever you may become, sir, and her orders were that, willingly or unwillingly, you should travel in the carriage as it is; therefore, if you will not get in I must put you in," and seizing Max by the arm he endeavoured to force him into the vehicle. Max, while struggling with his opponent, called for aid, first to the driver, then to the hedger, neither of whom paid him any attention; the one went to his horses, the other worked with redoubled energy, and at the same time by singing lustily he effectually deafened himself against Max's cries.

"Let go my arm, fellow," said the Captain, for Pedro clung pertinaciously; "you shall not slander your mistress so foully as to make me believe she meant this."

Pedro finding that the Captain was getting the better in the struggle uttered one gentle call: "John." Slight though the sound was it reached the hedger. At

once pausing from his work, he advanced, brandishing his bill. Max, who had just succeeded in freeing himself from Pedro, angry at this threatening, made an effort to snatch the weapon from the hand of his new antagonist. In the struggle, perchance by pure accident, perchance because John, seeing that the Captain was likely to gain his end and throw him to the ground, was tempted to use his weapon, the sharp-edged bill descended upon Max's chest; at the same instant Pedro seized his arms from behind to force him down. This was so far fortunate, as it probably saved Max's life, for had the bill inflicted such a gash upon his breast or side as it did upon his shoulder it might have killed him on the spot; as it was, he fell senseless.

"There, we have done a pretty work now," said John, standing aghast.

"No harm," said Pedro; "the letting of a little hot blood never killed a man yet. Here, help me lift him into the carriage before he comes to; then remove those traces of blood, we must leave no marks of the scuffle."

"To think that I should lay finger on him, even in self-defence," said John, as he gave his comrade the desired aid; "my father was his father's forester for many years."

"Tush," said Pedro, "the lad is demented! Do you suppose that either I or our mistress, who is his own flesh and blood, wish to do him any harm? But if he will not follow the path that is clearly for his own advantage he must be forced into it. Cover your dirty clothes with that great coat and get on to the box; and you, loon," addressing the coachman, "make yourself ready."

Whether this reasoning of forcing a man to what is good for him by violent assault silenced the scruples of the son of the ex-forester of the Thesiger family it is hard to say, but he did not answer, donned the coat that was handed to him, and mounted the box beside the coachman, who was, as he looked, almost a fool. Pedro got in with the prisoner or patient, which ever name you like to give him, and they started.

Pedro applied himself very skilfully to staunching the blood, but did not take any measures for restoring his patient to consciousness; indeed it rather seemed from his attitude that had nature done the work for him he would have been inclined to counteract her kindness by giving Max a blow on the head.

It was one o'clock when they reached Miss Wybeer's house. Pedro told John and another to carry Max to a bed-room, while he gave an account of their proceedings to their mistress.

"Wounded! senseless! say you?" cried the old lady, leaping up. "Fellow, you shall answer for this to me."

"It was his own fault, not ours," replied Pedro, and related what had happened word for word, action for action, as if it were a matter of history.

Ruth Wybeer listened attentively, and when he had concluded she said in the tone of a princess, praising and yet reproving her servants: "You have done your duty, Pedro, therefore I cannot blame you; but had your manner been more gentle this might have been prevented. Where have you laid this foolish boy?"

"In the south room, madam."

"I will go to him."

She accordingly went to her nephew's bedside, examined his wound, and satisfied herself that there was no danger and no need to summon the aid of a surgeon. While she was tending him Max opened his eyes and asked dreamily where he was? She replied soothingly, administering to him a strengthening draught, in which she had mixed a sedative sufficient to ensure her patient a long slumber. Max was too much weakened by the loss of blood to be very troublesome in his inquiries, and, soothed by her light, dexterous touch, soon fell asleep. Ruth Wybeer lingered long enough to be certain that he was in a deep, refreshing, natural sleep, then leaving him in the care of the son of his father's old forester, she went into the ante-room, saying to Pedro, whom she found there:

"Well! he is safely disposed of, at least for the present; he will do nothing contrary to my wishes for some days at the least. What is this, though?" she added, approaching the table upon which were arranged a number of small properties, such as a watch, pencil-case, papers, etc.

"They were in Captain Thesiger's pockets, madam."

"Oh!" and Miss Wybeer gathering them up carried them with her to her room, where, however, a violent ring soon summoned Pedro. He found his mistress looking deadly pale, supporting herself with one hand on the table, while with the other she pointed towards a large coloured photograph she had found among her nephew's papers.

"What is that, Pedro?" she asked in a solemn, agitated voice.

Pedro started as he looked. "It is the image of your niece," he said.

"But see the date and the name," continued his mistress.

"Alice Montague!" read Pedro. "Montague!" he repeated, looking up. "Was not that the name of the man for whose sake your niece disobeyed you?"

"It was," said Miss Wybeer. Then, as if she had hitherto been repressing her imagination, she now at once sprang to a conclusion. "Then it was with that girl that Max Thesiger was coquetting. I said her voice sounded strangely familiar to me."

"Then perhaps," said Pedro hesitatingly, "there would be no objection to their marrying."

"*Never!*" interrupted his mistress, decidedly. "Max's grandfather and this girl's grandmother, if indeed she be my niece's daughter, were twin brother and sister, therefore they must not marry; but oh! for the certainty, and if I but see her!"

"Mr. Watson's papers must arrive soon," said Pedro.

"It may be days; this crisis may pass never to return," said his mistress in an eager, excited tone. "If I had them both under my roof now immediately I might be able to bring them to reason. Is there no method?"

"It might be possible," said Pedro, "to obtain possession of the young lady's person and bring her here; but the police—"

"The police!" repeated Miss Wybeer with scornful impatience. "What business have they to interfere when I require to see my own niece?"

Pedro was not the villain of novels, who persuaded his employers on to desperate measures in order that he may then betray them to his own profit. He was a simple, honest-minded fellow, with a firm belief in Miss Wybeer's superior judgment; he considered it quite reasonable that she should require to see her niece, or to assure herself that the girl was such; he therefore speedily unfolded a plan which met with his mistress's approbation. He, with John the forester, and another trusty fellow were to go to M—, and watch about Major Kempthorn's house; if they saw an opportunity of effecting their purpose they were to send a message for the carriage to meet them at a certain point; should they see no chance of doing their work that night they were to return and see what the morning's post might bring, for had she but had patience to wait she would probably have obtained the desired information.

With what success Pedro's errand was attended the reader already knows. We need only add here that the third person employed was a poacher, whom Pedro had once saved from prison, and who was bound to do him a service in return; though he warned his benefactor that he considered this as a full cancelling of his debt, and that though he would keep silence now, he need expect nothing more from him of a similar nature. To this Pedro made no answer; he was too wise to risk losing the aid of so valuable an auxiliary by disputing with him upon the precise amount of gratitude that was owing to him.

Her messengers departed; Ruth Wybeer returned to her nephew's sick room, where she sat watching his

slumber, which was calm and healthful. It lasted, however, so long that she was considering the expediency of waking him, when there was a loud peal at the hall bell, and she hurried to the stairs to receive the news whatever it might be.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"*Nunca à tão cheia de attractivos a mulher como ao velar sollicita por um doente que estima. As mais levianas revela se lhes então a grandeza e sublimidade da sua missão na terra. O coracão que as vaidades podiam trazer abafado, estremece e accorda ao primero grite de dôr. E n'essas occasiões bem conhece que o prestigio que exerce è absoluto; perde então a timidez habitual & olha nos dessa-sombrada.*"—JULIO DINEZ, 'As pupillas do Senhor Reitor.'

"A woman is never so charming as when watching by the bed of a sick man whom she loves."

WHEN Max Thesiger awoke it was to a hazy, uncertain feeling that made him think he must still be dreaming. His head was clear and without pain, but his shoulder was strangely stiff and uncomfortable. The room he was in was completely dark, and the illusion was aided by his being unable to keep his eyes open, and he again sunk into a doze, which, however, was very light, for he was almost immediately aroused by some one entering the room; and then the phase of the dream seemed changed; the room was illuminated but empty. His eye fell on a picture that hung opposite to his bed—it was Miss Berriton, yet strangely different, for it was the same portrait that he had seen at his aunt's lodgings at B—, and whereas Miss Berriton's usual expression was reserved and cold, that of her likeness

was haughty still, but bright and animated with the flush of youth and beauty.

Max gazed with the distressed feeling of one who is in a painful dream from which he cannot awaken; but his ears now took the task of deceiving him; he heard a voice that made him start. There could be no doubt to whom those clear, passionless tones belonged that were now engaged in sharp altercation with some one in his room. He opened his eyes. By his bedside stood Isabella, not the brilliant Isabella of his vision, but paler and graver even than when he had parted with her the night before. She wore a riding dress, and carried her hat in her hand, but both were plain black without any relief of colour.

"I am indeed sorry, Captain Thesiger, to see you so ill," she said.

"Miss Berriton," he cried, "how, when came you here? Where am I?"

"Before letting him talk," said a voice behind Isabella, "a good nurse will give her patient something to eat. Do you not see that he is exhausted?"

"I am not Captain Thesiger's nurse," said Isabella, moving haughtily aside.

There had been a dispute between her and Miss Wybeer to induce her to do so much as come and see the Captain; but no further would she go, and she firmly refused the cup that Miss Wybeer wished to force into her hand, replying to the old lady's threatening gesture with a quiet: "Madam, I have been willing to please you so much, but it is not for the Captain's honour or for mine that I should do more."

"Girl," replied the old lady impatiently, "will you,

who pretend to believe in the workings of fate, refuse to do what has been put before you as much in my despite as in your own?"

Max had been employing the interval in collecting his scattered thoughts, and he now spoke resolutely: "Madam, by what means Miss Berriton is under your roof I know not, but remember that you have already a long reckoning to answer if your servants wounded me by your order, so beware how you add to it by your treatment of this young lady."

Isabella saw that he was unduly exciting himself and answered very coolly: "Thank you, Captain Thesiger, pray do not trouble yourself about me; I am certain no harm is intended me, and Major Kempthorn will be here to-morrow. Miss Montague must ere this have reached home."

"Miss Montague! Has she been in any danger?" cried Max, leaping up.

"Girl! girl!" said Miss Wybeer sharply, "will you do nothing but harm? Hold your tongue and leave the room."

Isabella was only too thankful to obey. She paused for a moment to answer, "You need not distress yourself about Miss Montague, Captain Thesiger; I parted with her at four o'clock in good health; in less than an hour after she left me she would be safe at home."

In the relief that Max experienced at this news he sank back upon his pillows and allowed his aunt to arrange the bandages, and give him the food she had prepared for him; after which, however, his inquiries became urgent as to why he had been treated thus? how

Miss Berriton came there? and where they were? To all Miss Wybeer turned a deaf ear, only yielding so far as to call Isabella to bid him good night. She had not far to seek. Pedro, receiving orders from his mistress to see that the young lady did not escape, but no other directions as to how she was to be disposed of, had thought her safety best secured by locking her into the little ante-room we have before mentioned, whose only other outlet was through Max's bedchamber. Here Miss Wybeer found her sitting in an attitude of the deepest dejection—the natural reaction after the strain of the day. All her worst fears seemed verified: Max was apparently dangerously wounded; they were both in the power of a seemingly irresponsible person. Oh! why had not Alice come? she might have nursed her lover to their mutual advantage. But Isabella would not trust herself to dwell on this subject lest she should think hardly of Alice; it was not that her sense of right had grown less distinct, but within these last few hours she had come to judge Alice by a gentler, if a lower standard. She turned her thoughts back to her own condition: that Miss Wybeer was mad she considered there could be no doubt; and she resolved to aggravate her as little as possible, and to give her no excuse for using more violence than she might otherwise be inclined to employ. She had arrived at this poi[illegible]hen the lady herself appeared and desired b[illegible]aptain Thesiger good night.

This she did, hoping sh[illegible] the morning.

"But, Miss B[illegible] this," said M[illegible]

that augured ill for the repose she was wishing him.

She told him briefly what had happened, saying as little as possible of Alice Montague, and omitting altogether to mention her cowardice.

"Then Miss Montague was with you?" said Max.

"Yes," answered Isabella, soothingly; "but I am sure she would be at home as soon as she could conveniently ride back."

"I do not understand this," said Max, passing his hand over his brow; "the only thing I see at all clearly is, that somehow you have been brought into danger on my account, for which I am very sorry. I hope my ideas will be less confused in the morning. Good night."

"Good night," replied Isabella, and returned to the ante-room, where she found Miss Wybeer, who conducted her to the apartment prepared for her use—a small room accessible only from the ante-chamber. This arrangement was rather ingenious, as it enabled Miss Wybeer to lock both her prisoners in by the outer door, and at the same time allowed them free communication with one another should they be so inclined.

Miss Berriton declined all offers of supper or attendance, and, retiring to her room, she carefully secured her door from within; then throwing herself upon the d she endeavoured to get what rest was possible. e v vents of the day crowded upon her; her ry throbbing, and it required all her self- or ep her quiet upon her couch, instead of p om with hasty steps. She thought till

her head ached; considered all that she had been able to see of the house and its surroundings, and endeavoured to lay her plans for the morrow, not only for her own escape, but also for that of Max Thesiger, should he prove, like herself, a captive. Coming to no satisfactory conclusion she dismissed the subject; but then she was haunted by the legends of the past; the gloomy prognostications for the future, which now mysteriously seemed on the point of being fulfilled. She was the last of her race, and she stood in danger, perhaps of her life, from the wild caprice of a madwoman; by a painful effort she also banished this train of thought, and let her imagination wander back — strange to say — to Alice Montague; and, more strangely still, found pleasure in the contemplation. Let not our readers smile, and fancy that they have discovered something, when we say that it was since she had known that Max loved Alice that Isabella had looked upon her with a more gentle eye.

Thus passed the night; she longed to be able to sleep, but she could not; at last, about six, she struck a light, bathed her burning face with cold water. ordered her dress, and went into the ante-chamber, She tried the handle of the outer door; it was locked; she laid her hand on that next to it, before she recollected that it led to Captain Thesiger's room. For the present she could do nothing; she therefore sat down by the window to watch for the first cold beams of the November morning. She had not been thus many minutes when the door of Captain Thesiger's room was opened, and the last person she expected to see at that time—Max himself—made his appearance.

Max had a scarcely more restful night than Isabella; he was tortured with the thought, how it was she had been brought there; what aim his aunt could have in thus rendering herself liable to the law by these violent attacks upon two unoffending persons; what Alice could have to do with it—for he gathered, both from Isabella's tale and something Miss Wybeer had let fall, that Alice was concerned, and that she ought to be there instead of Isabella. Miss Berriton had, however, impressed him with her confidence that the Major would be there in the morning, and on this he soothed himself into a doze, during which Miss Wybeer went to have a few hours' rest herself, leaving an old woman to look after her patient, the only female servant in the house; for among the lady's peculiarities was the contempt in which she held her own sex. The old dame thus put on guard did not at all consider that since the patient was drowsy she should not nod also; gradually her naps grew longer, until at last, when Max awoke from an uneasy slumber, his attendant was fast asleep.

It was at this moment that Isabella touched his door. He guessed who was up and about, and he conceived the notion of having a conversation with her before there were listeners and interruptions.

He rose and dressed; although weak, he was not so prostrated by his wound as the evening before he had had reason to fear. Concealing all defects in his toilet with a large flowered dressing-gown that lay conveniently over the foot of his bed, he boldly entered the adjoining room.

Despite all the care he had taken to make himself

tidy; despite the arch, almost roguish glance of his eye, he looked so wan and ghost-like that Isabella started with an exclamation of dismay. He raised his hand warningly, and closed carefully the door behind him, answering her mute glance towards the outer door with—"No, Miss Berriton; I mean not to escape; I am not fit for that; I only want to talk to you before there are spies about."

"You ought not to be up, Captain," said Isabella, as he sank wearily into a chair near the window.

"Never mind. I will go back to bed presently. Now tell me, firstly, How you and Miss Montague came to be together alone?"

"Miss Montague was not well," said Isabella, "and we went for a quiet ride."

"Not well?" said Max, but not in the tone of sympathy he would have used the day before. "What was the matter with her?"

"Only a headache—nothing serious."

"Now why did she not come here? for I have gathered from my aunt that she neither expected nor desired to see you?"

It was evident that Max was fully himself this morning, and Isabella was thankful that the dim light, for the candle had gone out, prevented him from seeing her face as she answered something about Alice not being strong.

"But what forced *you* to come?" persisted Max.

"Nothing. I came of my own free will," said Isabella energetically.

"*Your own free will?*" Max's tone was expressive.

Isabella's cheeks burnt with shame. What must

he think of her? but at all events she must screen Alice.

"Yes, sir," she replied firmly; "I repeat no one could have *forced* me to come; it was my own choice."

"I am sure I am deeply obliged to you," said Max, with a slightly ironical emphasis.

"Now I hope you are satisfied, and will go back to bed; it is really very wrong of you to be up."

"Not at all. So far from being *satisfied*, I still want to know how it was that Miss Montague did not at any rate accompany you, for I understand that she, not you, was the object of the attack. Miss Berriton, I must know. If you will not tell me I will find out by some other means. Did Miss Montague *refuse* to come?"

"Captain Thesiger," said Isabella, distressed, "I have told you that she was indisposed, and that no force was used to compel me hither. Will you not be contented with that?"

"I entreat you to answer me," he said. "Tell me how the case stands."

She did not reply.

"Miss Berriton, speak, I implore you," he said, leaning forward and laying his hand on hers. "I have the gravest suspicion that Miss Montague has acted most unkindly, if not falsely by you."

"No, no!" cried Isabella, "put that idea out of your head."

He sank back with a sigh of intense relief; this testimony to Alice's uprightness from one who had no good reason for liking her was an intense satisfaction to him.

Isabella hoped that he was now fairly disposed of, but in a minute he began again.

"Then I understand that Miss Montague was asked and would not come?"

Isabella saw that she would gain nothing by longer evading, so she replied: "Miss Montague had been overtired the night before; she was not mistress of herself, and the attack upon us so terrified her that to have come would have made her really ill. So when they threatened to use violence unless we made some arrangement I decided to come, believing then, as I do still, that she wanted bodily power, not the will."

"I think she might have come," said the lover in a disappointed tone.

Isabella was silent, and gazed out of the window. The sky was growing brighter, and the trees of the park, which on this side approached very near to the house, stood out dark and dim in the twilight and fog. Before they either spoke again the door in Max's room was opened, and the old woman who had been left to tend him rushed out, crying:

"My hinny, my hinny, where is he? He has flown, and I must answer to the mistress for him."

"I am here, old woman," said Max hastily, anxious to stop her before her cries should alarm the household.

"And what, hinny, are you doing out of your warm bed?" said the old woman in a shriller tone than before; "it is like to be the death of you."

"Peace," said Isabella authoritatively. "Go and put Captain Thesiger's bed in order."

The old woman gave a still shriller scream. "Oh!

do not look at me in that way," she said, "it is fit to kill me; you have the eyes, no one else has them, like the family," and hastily retiring into Max's room, she shut the door.

"That reminds me, Miss Berriton," said the gentleman, "that I meant to ask you if you are connected with Miss Wybeer, and how it is that your portrait comes to be hanging up in my room?"

"My portrait?" said Isabella.

"Yes; it is exactly like; it haunted my dreams, and the first thing I did this morning was to examine it. Were it not for the dress I should say it was taken last week."

"I never heard of any relation of that name," said Isabella. "I will go and look at it."

She entered the inner room.

"Now don't ye come here," said the old attendant; "I'll do no harm to ye; I'll do your bidding, only don't ye look at me, don't ye."

"I do not wish to have anything to do with you," said Miss Berriton. "Be quick with what you are doing; Captain Thesiger wishes to return to bed."

And unheeding the old woman's whining entreaties to her to go, she examined the picture, and then returned to Max.

"It is not a likeness of me," she said, "but it is exactly like, or a copy of one we have at Cairniebrow Hall, always said to be of my grandmother, who died early; my grandfather's first wife, as I have lately heard she was. I need not disguise it from you," she added, as he looked fixedly at her, "I learnt it from Joe Brockton that day we were so nearly drowned."

"Had his second wife any children?" asked Thesiger thoughtfully.

"Do not ask me about that," said Isabella in a strangely agitated tone, and with an expression that Max saw for the first time on her face, that of fear. "Are you suffering?" she added abruptly, as he frowned slightly.

"Not much; this bandage is a little too tight, that is all. I wonder if that old woman could loosen it."

"Would you let me try?" said Isabella shyly. "My uncle taught me something of surgery." And suiting the action to the word she gave the patient the desired relief.

"Thank you," said Max, looking up into her face with a lazy, mischievous smile. "It seems a shame to requite your kindness by teasing you, but is not this rather a contradiction of your declaration of last night, when Miss Wybeer wanted you to give me something to eat?"

"That was one thing," said Miss Berriton in confusion, "to undertake to nurse you as Miss Wybeer wanted to make me, and quite another to do so simple a thing for you as to put you at ease."

Max grasped her wrist warningly. The old woman was standing in the doorway watching them with a cunning expression in her eye.

"Is the Captain's bed ready?" said Isabella in her tone of command.

"Yes, hinny, yes," answered the woman, with the most abject submission.

"Then you will go to it," said Isabella to the patient, "and I will prepare you a cup of tea."

She went to the table, on which stood a small kettle and spirit lamp.

"You seem to have assumed despotic authority," said Max.

"A sick room is a woman's kingdom," she answered; "now do not remonstrate, or you do not know what I may send you."

Accordingly Max was hardly settled in bed when his old attendant came to him with a cup of tea, which Miss Berriton hoped he would take. He drank it, and, soothed alike in mind and body, fell into a sounder slumber than he had enjoyed all through the night.

Isabella remained standing by the window watching the gradual clearing of the landscape. She could not help murmuring to herself: "It seems as if it were true, as if the prophecy were fulfilling: I am the only one left."

"Then you know the dark and fatal guilt of your family?" said a voice behind her, and Miss Wybeer laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"Who is it that asks that question?" said Isabella. "What know you of it?"

"Much," was the reply; "more than you do. I can perchance explain some things to you."

"Never!" said Isabella. "There was but one who could tell me what I would give anything I possess to know, but she must be long dead."

"What is it you so desire to know?" said Miss Wybeer curiously. "Do you wish to peer into futurity?"

Isabella had heard of the influence of the evil eyes and of the power which some people possess to make others speak in their own despite; some such power Miss

Wybeer seemed to have over her, compelling her to tell what she would fain keep silent as the grave. Her reply was cautious.

"I desire to know something of the fate of a child who, for aught I know, died in its cradle."

"It did not die in its cradle," said Miss Wybeer solemnly.

Isabella started round and looked her full in the face. There was strange resemblance between the little witch-like aged woman and the tall girl before her. It might be only in the expression of their eyes, which was such to keep prudent people aloof from them.

"Tell me," said Isabella with trembling accents, "what I long to know, and I will thank you, even for the suffering you have caused me."

"I will tell you nothing," said Miss Wybeer.

"You are but mocking me with pretended knowledge," cried Isabella in despair.

"Wake not him that slumbereth," said her companion imperatively. "Strange it is," she added half aloud, half to herself, "that I should be patiently looking on you, the descendant of that house; but the tie of blood cannot be broken, though men, aye, and women too, act sometimes as if there were no such thing. What know you of your family history?" she continued to Isabella; "you speak as if all had not been happy with you."

"I know that my grandfather's second marriage was most wretched," said Isabella, speaking with reluctance.

"Then you heard it as a death-bed confession," answered Miss Wybeer; "there is no man living could have told you the tale."

The light of conviction flashed upon Isabella. "You are, you must be," she cried, "the sister of young Mrs. Berriton."

"Girl! girl!" shouted Miss Wybeer, "mention not that name, unless you would have me do that we shall both repent."

Unheeding the threat, Isabella pursued, with hungry, burning eyes: "Oh! remove the curse you have laid upon our unhappy family—recall your words."

"Do you fear the fulfilment of it upon yourself?" asked Miss Wybeer with contempt.

"No," cried Isabella pleadingly; "do to me what you will, I am in your power; satisfy your hate and revenge to the utmost; but oh! remove the curse from those who are dead—from my mother, from the uncle who was a father to me."

"Oh! Ralph Berriton had good cause to tend well his eldest brother's child," said Miss Wybeer bitterly.

"His eldest sister's," corrected Isabella. "My mother was Katherine Berriton, who married a cousin distant indeed, but bearing the same name."

"Katherine Berriton never had a child," said Miss Wybeer.

A horrible doubt rushed upon Isabella's mind.

"Who, then, were my parents?" she asked faintly.

"You are the only daughter of Geoffrey, the eldest son of the family," replied Miss Wybeer; "the mortal enemy of her whom you call young Mrs. Berriton." And before Isabella had sufficiently recovered from the stunned sensation that this sudden news produced upon her, either to answer or to oppose her, Miss Wybeer had left the room, locking the door behind her.

CHAPTER XIX.

"'Twas high noon when they reached the castle gate,
The sun shone bright and strong;
The lady was there with reproachful mien;
She said, You have tarried long."

MAJOR KEMPTHORN, with his friend of the law and their attendant, Barnes, arrived at the village of Buckly. Here they paused at the inn, and from the host they learnt that Captain Thesiger had left his horse there the day before, and that they expected him back either to-day or to-morrow.

"That proves," said Mr. Thornby to the Major, as they rode on their way, "that whatever has happened to young Thesiger happened after he left Buckly. I wonder if she gave him the same rendezvous at the White Cross turning, and if she has prepared for us a similar reception. At any rate, if we come off badly, it shall not be said it was because we lost our tempers. Whatever befalls us, Mr. Barnes, do not attempt to defend us, but ride straight back to Buckly to summon help."

They approached the White Cross turning; there on a gate sat a man, the only one in sight.

"Are you Miss Wybeer's servant?" asked the Major as the fellow sprang down from his gate.

"Yes," replied the man, who was our worthy ac-

quaintance Pedro. "I have been sent to guide you to Coon Hall."

"You are on foot," said the Major. "How will you keep up with our horses?"

"You may trot along here if you like," said Pedro; "but the ground will soon be such that you will be obliged to go my pace."

They started at a brisk walk, Pedro keeping without any apparent difficulty by their sides.

Presently he turned aside into a field in that condition known to farmers as "uncleaned land," and very much it deserved the name; it had been left untilled for more than one season; the remains of the crop last sown there, together with the weeds which had sprung up of themselves, encumbered the ground. Add to this that the field lay low, and that a large part of it, if not actually under water, was overspread with deep pools and marshy spots, and you will have some idea of the track over which Pedro proposed to guide his mistress's guests.

"You cannot expect us to get over this, surely," said the lawyer.

"It is the short cut," said Pedro.

"Then go this way by all means," said the Major, impatiently; "that is, if you can get along."

"I will not trouble you with my delays," said Pedro; and he truly kept his word, for, starting at a good round pace, he was at the opposite side before the riders had got a third of the way.

"How far are we now from your mistress's house?" asked the lawyer when they had rejoined their guide.

"About a mile," was the reply. "We enter her property here by the little fir copse."

"I did not know her estate was so large," said Mr. Thornby, as they passed the gate that led into the copse in question.

"The property really takes in the whole of Buckly," said Pedro.

"Wybeer—Coon Hall," repeated Mr. Thornby, whose profession had made him familiar with most of the great divisions of property in England. "I do not know either name."

"Nevertheless, it is a fact what I tell you," said Pedro.

The lawyer was glad that the path only allowed them to ride single file, so that the Major did not hear this speech, as he might have been provoked to resent this impudence even by action.

The copse past they entered a kind of park where were several handsome trees, but all bore the marks of extreme neglect. Where a tree had decayed, or been blown down, there had been no attempt to replace it, or even to remove it, but it lay blocking the path. The grass was long and untidy, and wherever there was a fence to be seen it was broken or partially destroyed. Through this unkept domain they rode until they came in sight of the house, which was very large, but low and straggling. There was no garden, or pretence at cultivated land, but on every side the park approached close up to the house. One thing was very remarkable—they saw no man, or trace of man's foot along the damp path they were traversing, even round the house there was no one moving. They

stopped at the front door. Pedro acted the part of hall porter as well as that of groom; for while with the one hand he opened the door and invited the gentlemen to enter, with the other he offered to take charge of their horses.

Barnes, unbidden, followed Pedro and the steeds. The gentlemen entered and found their way to a large room on the ground floor which looked like a library. Apparently it had not been used for years, for the dust lay thick on the chairs and tables, and the green baize that covered the book-cases, from the ceiling to the floor, was coated with cobwebs. The attempt to make it more comfortable by lighting a fire had as yet succeeded only in giving it a more desolate appearance, for the wood was damp, and the flame burnt low and hissing in the grate.

The gentlemen had hardly had time to mark this arrangement in low tones, when hasty steps were heard approaching; the door was opened, and Isabella Berriton entered the room.

"Oh, Major!" she cried, regardless of everything but the relief of seeing a known face, "I am so glad you are come."

"My poor child," he said, embracing her heartily, "how are you?"

"Very well, thanks," she replied, clinging to him with affection that she had certainly never showed before.

The Major took no notice of the pale cheeks and dark-rimmed eyes that rather belied her words, but called her attention to Mr. Thornby, saying, "Here is another friend for you, Isa."

She held out her hand with assuredly more graciousness than when he had last had the pleasure of waiting upon her, thanking him for coming to her aid. He was expressing his pleasure at being able to do anything for her, with all the gallantry of a bachelor of the old school, when a sharp voice called from the door,

"So Miss Montague is not with you?"

They looked round, and both gentlemen started, for in Miss Wybeer, who stood before them attired in deep mourning, they recognized, one, his mysterious visitor and warner at Cairniebrow Hall; the other, a client he had supposed to be dead some fifteen years before. The lawyer, as was proper, was the first to recover and to answer, "No, madam; Miss Montague is not with us, she being still far from well."

"Or rather," said Miss Wybeer, regarding him keenly, "because you were afraid as to what might happen to her here."

"Madam," said the Major courteously, but firmly, "your conduct to Miss Berriton has been such as to justify that precaution."

"I think," said Miss Wybeer, "that I have given you quite sufficient guarantee for my good faith—admitting you into my very house, I have put myself into your power. I can do you no harm; but know that I will not open my lips until Miss Montague is here. When she comes I will explain everything to your satisfaction; until then I will not speak. Decide for yourselves."

They drew apart, and, after a short consultation, the lawyer said, "Miss Wybeer, you must be aware that you have given us reason to be suspicious; we cannot

consent to Miss Montague's coming here unless you will allow her to be accompanied by Mr. Herbert Kempthorn, attended by the servant we shall send for her, and a policeman.

"As you please," said Miss Wybeer indifferently. "You may have the whole police force here if it would be any comfort to you. I will give them a meal, and a night's lodging too, if this girl does not arrive in time to finish our business before night."

"Then the sooner Barnes starts the better," said the lawyer, glancing towards the Major, who bowed his assent, and Mr. Thornby left the room.

Turning to Miss Wybeer, Kempthorn asked after her nephew.

"Miss Berriton can tell you better than I can," said the lady; "she has been tending him this morning."

"Madam!" said Isabella, angrily.

"Miss Wybeer," interposed the Major, "I will not allow Miss Berriton to be annoyed with such remarks in my presence."

"Tut, tut! Major," said Miss Wybeer sharply, "do not you interfere; she and I understand one another better than you think. He is better, though."

The lawyer now returned, having profited so well by his short absence that he was able to offer to guide his friend to the patient's room. They found Max dressed and lying on the sofa. In spite, however, of the gaiety of his manner and the brightness of his eyes, both were shocked to see how pale and like an invalid he looked. He greeted the Major warmly, [illegible] when he heard who his companion was, burst into [illegible]rry laugh.

"I feel quite flattered," he said; "the sword and the law—Major Kempthorn and Mr. Thornby—both coming to look after me."

"Not after you, you conceited boy," said the Major; "I was much more anxious for Isabella. Ah! there she is," he added, as she followed Miss Wybeer into the room.

"I have ordered refreshment to be prepared for you," said the latter. "I must beg you to excuse me; I have some papers to arrange before this evening. Miss Berriton has kindly undertaken to assist me."

It was a little annoying to the new-comers, after their night and morning of anxiety as to the fate of their young friends, to find them on such apparent good terms with the author of the mischief. The lawyer gave a "I told you so" glance at the Major, who shook his head, and carefully secured the door after the ladies were gone.

"Now, Max," he said, "tell us how you were wounded."

"Only a loving token from my affectionate relative," he answered, laughing, and gave a full account of the summons, of his journey, of how he had been attacked, of Miss Berriton's unexpected appearance, etc.; hearing in return the story of what had happened to the two girls, as far as the Major himself knew it. He spared Max none of Alice's foolish fears; receiving no answer but a heavy sigh. He showed so much eagerness when he learnt that she was expected in a few hours that the Major, who had seen enough to be aware that Miss Wybeer was violently set against the match, rather alarmed, hastily turned round for some-

thing to change the conversation. His eye fell on the portrait.

"Why, Max," he said, "that is surely a portrait of Isabella. How came it here?"

"It is a copy of one of her grandmother that they have at Cairniebrow Hall," replied Max; "that is all she can tell me about it, and I have had no opportunity of asking Miss Wybeer."

"It is not a copy, though," said the lawyer, springing up to look at it; "the hall one is the copy. I fear the Berritons have not been very happy in their domestic arrangements. More than one lady has taken herself off without leave. The General was very reserved about family matters, but he once told me that the original was stolen by one of those flighty dames; but I should like to know how it came into Miss Wybeer's possession."

"Then that is Isabella's grandmother," said the Major, examining the picture.

"Grandmother? No; her grandfather's elder sister. Do you not see that they are the Berriton's features?"

"She says it is her grandfather's first wife," said Max.

"I never knew he had more than one," and "she knows nothing about it," began the lawyer and the soldier in the same breath. But sounds being heard in the next room; the former broke off his sentence and hurried into the ante-chamber, where he found Pedro arranging the table.

"What is your name, friend?" said Mr. Thornby, closing the door behind him.

"Pedro," answered that worthy, without pausing in his occupation.

"Do you know, Pedro," continued Mr. Thornby, "that you are in serious risk of going to jail?"

"How?" asked Pedro with manifest uneasiness.

"First, by your violent attack upon Captain Thesiger; then, by your forcibly carrying away Miss Berriton."

"I acted by my mistress's orders," said Pedro in a "is that all?" tone.

"Then your mistress is wrong."

"Not at all so," said Pedro. "Captain Thesiger is her nephew."

"But that does not authorize her wounding him for her own pleasure, nor does it at all apply to the young ladies."

"She has a right there too," said Pedro mysteriously.

"My friend," said the lawyer, "nothing could justify the attempt to take Miss Montague, or in her stead Miss Berriton, from under the care of her legal guardian. Granting that you are not responsible for that, you will yet have to answer for having wounded the Captain."

"It was not I that wounded him, but John the forester," said Pedro doggedly.

"Look here," said Mr. Thornby severely, "the same argument you used against your mistress can now be turned against yourself. If, because you fulfilled Miss Wybeer's orders you are not answerable; so, therefore, as John the forester obeyed you, so he is not answerable, but you are for him, as much as Miss Wybeer is for you."

Pedro seemed rather disconcerted by this unexpected turn to the reasoning. Mr. Thornby continued: "Then

I suppose you, John Forester, and the coachman are all Miss Wybeer's servants? Who was the third man that aided you in your attack upon the young ladies?"

"One that will never do the same again," said Pedro.

"Have you murdered him then, fellow?"

"Murdered him?" asked Pedro. "Why should I? No, sir; he is as well as you are. He did it because I had once done him a service, and he owed me something in return; he will keep his counsel now, but he will never do the like again, for he is about to embark for America. I have told you this frankly, sir, and no more will I say, though I were questioned by the judge and jury, and though the penalty for not answering was hanging."

Mr. Thornby was awake to the importance of keeping on good terms with this fellow, so though sorely tempted to turn him out of the room for his insolence, he only answered moderately, "I wish you well; but you must know that in obeying such orders you have put not only yourself, but your mistress also, into great danger."

"Miss Wybeer, sir," said the incorrigible Pedro, "understands her own business, and can give her own orders better than you can for her; and I recollect that the last thing she told me was to prepare you a meal, so with your leave, sir, I will go and send it upstairs."

So saying he left the room. Mr. Thornby was not altogether so enraged as might have been expected; the man's impertinence, great though it was, had a

coolness, a kind of dry humour in it, that made it almost amusing. He waited some time in the hopes that he would return, but as he did not he went back to his friends, whom he found still discussing and puzzling over the picture.

CHAPTER XX.

"A heavy task Watt Tinlinn had
To guide the counterfeited lad.
Soon as the palfrey felt the weight
Of that ill-omen'd, elfish freight
He bolted, sprung, and rear'd amain,
Nor heeded bit, nor curb, nor rein.
It cost Watt Tinlinn mickle toil
To drive him but a Scottish mile."

'Lay of the Last Minstrel.'

We feel certain that, heavy as was the task Watt Tinlinn had with the disguised goblin in the poem, it was, nevertheless, not so heavy as that imposed upon Herbert Kempthorn by his father, although in the first case it treated of an "elfish imp," and in the second of a young lady; for at least the honest borderer was spared the weeping and the hysterics with which Alice Montague plentifully favoured her cavalier.

When first the message arrived she declared she would not go at all. It was all in vain that they represented to her that her guardian would not have sent for her had there been any danger; that Robinson's going made her quite safe, and that Barnes (in colours borrowed from Pedro) described Max's wound as a mere scratch that he had received from his foot

slipping when stepping into his aunt's carriage. Alice only worked herself into a fever, until Grace in despair offered to go with her; but this Mrs. Kempthorn would not hear of, and gave Alice a good scolding, after which the young lady permitted them to make her ready for the journey, only, however, to burst out again worse than before when she found herself alone in the carriage with Herbert. The very sight of the policeman on the box instead of reassuring her only made her more miserable. She was sure there was peril, else why this precaution?

Poor Herbert, in dire perplexity, took her hand. "Dear Alice," he said, "my father would not call you into danger; and I will do my best to take care of you on the road."

This speech so far soothed Alice that she dried her eyes and listened to what he had to say to amuse and divert her; but he was heartily glad when, late in the afternoon, they came in sight of the house.

Alice clung to his hand as they drew up at the entrance of Coon Hall, but on the steps stood the Major waiting to receive her. She flew into his arms as if an enemy were pursuing her.

"Gently, my dear child," he said, releasing himself.

"Miss Montague will like to come to her room and have some tea," said a voice behind him, and Isabella, whom he had not seen since the morning, came down the stairs.

Alice did feel ashamed of her yesterday's conduct to her, and she warmly returned her proffered kiss, leaving the Major to hold fast by Isabella's hand. Miss Berriton continued: "Miss Wybeer thought we should like to

be together in our room upstairs. Shall I take you to it?"

Alice assented; and the two young ladies disappearing, the Major turned to greet his son. Very angry was he when he heard of Alice's behaviour, forgetting to whom he was speaking so far as to exclaim impatiently, "Well, I do hope Max will see now how wrapt up in herself she is."

"I think, father," said Herbert gently, "that if she were once thoroughly in love she would forget herself and her fears."

Thus recalled to himself, the Major looked at his son much amused.

"I hope your opinion may prove a true one," he said; "but take something to eat, you must be tired and hungry too."

Scarcely had Mr. Kempthorn concluded a hurried meal when Pedro appeared to summon them, in his mistress's name, to Captain Thesiger's apartment. They found Max in the ante-room. A fire had been lit, and one or two things done to make the place more comfortable, but it had still a damp, cheerless look; and though Herbert had been prepared for his cousin's possible condition, he was shocked to find him lying on the sofa.

"Well, Herbert," said Max, holding out his hands. "Gently," he added, as Herbert shook his hand; "my wounded shoulder will not quite permit that. No harm yet," for Herbert sprang back as if he had been stung.

Miss Wybeer now entered with the two girls. Alice felt bitter shame and remorse when she saw how ill

Max was, and remembered her refusal to come to him. Her cheeks glowed, having to meet him before so many witnesses. She went over to him, trying to stammer some hope about his being better. Max retained her hand, looking eagerly and rather reproachfully into her face.

"Miss Montague," said Miss Wybeer in a tone that had a sort of sharp metallic ring in it, "will you take a chair?"

Alice started round; her protectress, Isabella, was by the window; she would like to join her, but between them stood the frowning Miss Wybeer, and Alice sank into the first chair that came in her way.

Miss Wybeer then seated herself and began her tale; but as all the first part of it is already known to the reader we will pass briefly over it, merely recalling to his memory such facts as are likely to have slipped from it.

It will be remembered that when Maximilian Thesiger visited his aunt at V——, she had told him a wild legend, suppressing, however, names and dates. It is needless to say that this tale referred to the Berriton and Wybeer families, three sons of the former family having married daughters of the latter; there had also been other marriages between more distant branches of the two families, so that they were more or less closely connected. It might have been thought, that after the first two unfortunate marriages the Berriton gentlemen would not have cared to have more to do with that fated family. That it was not so shall presently be shown.

At the end of last century, or beginning of this, died the last Wybeer of his generation; he had been one of a large family, who, however, had all died childless, so that he had no near relations of his own name. He left two sons and three daughters; the eldest, considerably older than his brother and sisters, was verging on middle life when they were still in the bloom of youth; next to him came Ruth, then some years younger, again a twin brother and sister. The twin brother married the first, the heiress of the Thesiger family, whose name he took with the property. Thus separated from his brethren, he knew but little of the stormy scenes of their later life, and lived and died in comfort and wealth; he was Max Thesiger's grandfather. Three years after his marriage his eldest brother died, leaving all the Wybeer property to the two sisters, the younger of whom, who bore the ill-fated name of Mabel, was engaged to General Berriton. While he lived her brother had always opposed the marriage, not from any superstitious feeling that a union with one of that name would never be lucky, but because, as he pointed out to his sister, the General's being advanced in life, and having sons and daughters of the same age as herself, was sufficient to make it undesirable. But Ruth, whose passion for old tales was even then a madness, had taken it into her head that as the third time you persevere in a thing it is likely to prove fortunate, so the third time a Wybeer took the name of Berriton nothing but happiness would follow, so she pushed on the marriage with all the force of an ardent, impatient spirit. The reader has already heard the story of

Mabel Wybeer's brief married life from Joe Brockton's confession to Isabella. We will now allow Miss Wybeer to continue her own tale.

"And," pursued the old lady with greater vehemence, "the hand of God was upon them; there was no need for human vengeance. One by one they drooped and died—Geoffrey, Katherine, Ralph."

Mr. Thornby touched the Major and pointed to Miss Berriton. Isabella had been facing them with teeth set, and cheeks deeply dyed with crimson, as if upon her personally fell every word spoken to the shame of her family; but when she heard the uncle mentioned who had brought her up she buried her face in her hands and turned towards the wall with a low stifled groan. Her guardian went round to her. "Come away," he whispered, "there is no need for you to stay."

"I will hear it all," she replied; "I know it." But as he seated himself by her she leant her head gratefully against his shoulder.

The Major, by his attention to Isabella, had lost a few words; apparently they expressed some keen desire for vengeance, for they roused the indignation of Max Thesiger, and raising himself upon his elbow, he exclaimed with flashing eyes, "Madam, I implore you stop, and reflect what a bitter mockery it must be whenever you say, 'Forgive us, as we forgive them that trespass against us.'"

"Nephew," said Miss Wybeer, more patiently than was her wont, "I have done nothing; I have sought no vengeance."

"At least respect the memory of the dead, if you

will not spare the feelings of the living," said Max with greater energy.

"I have forgiven them—Geoffrey Berriton's daughter knows that I have," she replied.

At this name the lawyer, who had been taking notes of the more important points of her tale, looked round eagerly, as if expecting some interesting fact, but she continued almost piteously,

"Let me go on; if I do not finish now I shall never do so; I am very old, and my strength is going."

They were silent; she paused a moment to collect herself, then resumed:

"Yes, I am all alone; the name of Wybeer will perish with me as that of Berriton will with her." (She looked towards Isabella.) "I have thought fit to tell this tale myself, for none but I know it all in all its completeness; now let it be forgotten. I have no near relations. Maximilian Thesiger, you bear an alien's look and an alien's name. It is fifty years this day since I laid my sister in her grave; it is nearly twenty-four since my niece, who was to me as a daughter, left me to marry a man of whom I disapproved. Alice Montague, did you ever know that your mother's name was Alice Berriton?" She paused; but before any one could speak she continued: "In your voice, when first I heard it two nights ago, I recognized a family ring; in your features, when I saw them in a portrait, and now living before me, I know my niece; in your behaviour I see the obstinacy that characterized her, and this day I have had placed in my hands the dying confession of a man who was instrumental to her marriage."

Alice uttered a faint scream of dismay; her guardian

glanced towards the lawyer, who spoke briefly and concisely. "I fully believe in all that Miss Wybeer says; I have studied the papers upon which she founds her claim, and I believe them to be genuine, comparing them as I can with my intimate knowledge of the past history of Captain and Mrs. Montague."

Miss Wybeer resumed: "After so many years' search for my niece, when, though I knew as well that she was dead as if I had stood by her dying bed and received her last breath, still I kept on in faith, I have found her child only when she is on the point of the doing of that which will ruin her happiness. Maximilian Thesiger knows that I have always opposed his wishes; I have done it from my knowledge of what was his upright and only safe course, and I now declare that they cannot wed, for they are the grandchildren of a twin brother and sister." Max turned his face to the pillow with a deep groan. Alice, very pale, gazed at Miss Wybeer with wide open eyes. The Major made a movement as though he would speak; she prevented him. "Hear me out," she said, "I have but few words more. The picture in the next room and these diamonds" (flinging on the table the necklace which has formed the theme of more than one legend, and which Major Kempthorn had seen her wearing when first he had met her at the cottage on the moor) "belong to Isabella Berriton, they were taken from her family by those who, though they were wronged, had no right to them, and I now return them to Geoffrey Berriton's daughter. Yes, Major Kempthorn, if you examine the papers you have in your possession, if you ask the old tenantry on the estate, you will hear that your ward is

the daughter of the head of her house, not the child of her who married a cousin. I say this for my own satisfaction; to her it can make no difference; she is, as I am, the last of her race. The rest of my property, as Mr. Thornby knows, in whose hands I have now placed my will, goes to my natural heirs. And now I have done; I have handed down the old traditions, repeated the old prophecies; the time has come for their fulfilment, but I shall not see it; I thought it had been granted to me to heal the long schism, but it is not so, I cannot control perverse wills."

No one broke the silence, at least openly, for the Major, bending low over Isabella, said to her:

"And did you know of this?"

"Partly, only partly," she answered, as if asking pardon for her concealment. "I knew enough to be aware of the terrible guilt that hangs over my family; but now all is explained, justice can be done."

Miss Wybeer had risen, and was standing before Alice.

"Alice Montague," she said, "you are the child of my erring niece; but still you are my relation. Will you give me the love she denied me?"

It must be remembered that Alice had looked upon Miss Wybeer with fear amounting to horror; that in her she saw the person who had obstructed what, in spite of her selfishness, was the dearest wish of her heart, her love to Max; and that this person, in asking for her affection, spoke slightingly of a mother whom Alice had fondly loved. If all this be remembered, it will be seen that though her answer was hard there was nevertheless great excuse for her. She shrank

from Miss Wybeer, sobbing, "I cannot, cannot love you."

Miss Wybeer drew back a few steps. "Then I am alone," she cried, with the bitterness of despair.

Strange it was that this woman, who had lived without affection for half a century, should feel thus grieved by the repulse of a girl, of whose very existence she had till lately been ignorant. Such is the contradiction of human nature; it was so. Miss Wybeer stood in the centre of the room, looking more utterly wretched than she had done while telling of the overwhelming sorrow of her early life.

This cry of anguish had roused Isabella. Releasing herself from the Major's protecting arm, she sprang forward, exclaiming, "Not alone, Miss Wybeer; I will love you; I, too, am connected with you."

Miss Wybeer turned towards her. "Can it be true?" she said incredulously. "Do I hear those words from the mouth of a Berriton, one, too, whom I have this day offended, telling of her ancestor's guilt?"

"It was the truth," said Isabella firmly.

This word seemed to bring conviction to Miss Wybeer's heart; she relaxed from her defiant position, flung her arms about the girl, and let her head sink upon her shoulder, appearing to have lost all power and will. Isabella partly guided, partly carried her from the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Tan dulce es perdonar."

THERE was a long silence after the two ladies had gone. Each member of the party had sufficient to occupy his thoughts. The lawyer was re-arranging his evidence, so that when called upon he might be able to prove that which he had declared he believed to be true. Major Kempthorn well recollected, at the time of his friend, Captain Montague's, marriage, hearing that there was something irregular about it; they were married from the dwelling of some of his relatives, not from those of the lady. He had written to expostulate, receiving for answer that the marriage was indeed against the wishes of the bride's family, but that as she was twenty-three, and an orphan, she was justified in choosing for herself; in short, Montague thanked his friend for his advice, but, as usually happens, declined to take it. Kempthorn was at the time immersed in family trouble, and did not remember even having heard Mrs. Montague's maiden name, and when at last he made her acquaintance, he had imbibed the idea that she had been educated by an aunt who never loved her, and that she had been captivated by the Captain's affection; and when he saw her extreme beauty and amiability, and thought of her husband's sterling

qualities, he felt that there was great excuse for their conduct, imprudent though it might have been. He was, therefore, inclined to admit Miss Wybeer's claim, especially as it had been made from no interested motive, but as it seemed from the pure love of justice.

He was roused by the entrance of Isabella; she looked very much distressed, and going straight up to him, said in a low, hurried tone,

"Can you help? I never saw such a house; there is no woman in it but an old crone who watched by Captain Thesiger last night, and she is completely childish. There are no servants in the house but that man Pedro and an idiot coachman."

"Is Miss Wybeer ill?" said the Major, starting up.

"Thoroughly exhausted," she answered. "You must not go to her," she added, as he moved towards the door.

"No, no; I am only going to see if I cannot find help of some sort. There must be more people in this great house."

"Better let me come with you," said the lawyer; "I know more of what is going on, and besides, I can keep my temper with friend Pedro better than you can."

Herbert followed them to remind them of their own servant, Barnes, who might be very useful on such an occasion. The two now left alone in the room remained for some time in silence, then Max, raising his head, pronounced the word "Alice!"

She started at the sound, sitting on the edge of his sofa; he spoke, the deep feeling that agitated him making his voice at times, though earnest, unsteady.

"Alice, I fear there is some reason in what Miss Wybeer says, that we may not think of marrying." She blushed deeply, and hid her face with her hand. "Forgive me, Alice," he pursued, "if I am blunt and inconsiderate, but we must face the truth. As I love you dearer than I can say, as in your attachment I have looked for my greatest happiness, so I believe we ought to pause and consider. Is it right, being so nearly connected, as I think there can be no doubt Miss Wybeer has proved we are, we should become more than friends? Alice, I should not be acting honourably by you were I not to speak thus distinctly." She did not answer. "Alice, there has that passed between us, and is known to have passed between us, that does not leave us where we were. I ask your opinion; my own doubts are so shadowy that I will gladly, joyfully abide by your decision." She did not move. "Alice, I entreat you to speak. If you wish to consult your friends, say so."

"I think you are very unkind to ask me any such question," sobbed Alice.

"Alice, be a woman; the time for childish things is past. We cannot honestly go on without settling this question. If nothing were to interfere with our wishes, and we yet had doubts in our own minds, we could not be happy in one another; to him who believes a thing is wrong to him it is wrong. Therefore, I implore you; answer me."

She turned to look at him: pale and grave he stood before her; his mental suffering had caused his brows to contract; his eyes were fixed upon her. She was displeased at the change: this was not the gay, hand-

some youth she had admired but two evenings ago. What business had he to question her thus sternly? "I do think it very unreasonable," she said, "that I cannot have a little fun without your looking at me in that way, and the Major and Miss Wybeer being so cross."

"Then, Alice, I am to understand that the matter ends here?"

She turned from him. Max put his hand to his head; he was dizzy. After a moment he spoke again.

"Will you kindly tell Major Kempthorn when he returns that I am tired and have gone to bed? I shall be glad to see him if he will come to my room."

"You are not angry with me?" she asked timidly.

"No. Good night, cousin Alice." He held her hand for one minute, then he was gone. Alice felt inclined for one instant to rush after and entreat him to forgive her; the next, she threw herself petulantly into a chair before the fire. It had only been her vanity that had been gratified by Max's attention; the deep love that Herbert had spoken of, which was to purify her character, had not yet touched her. With Max it had gone further: he had been disgusted by her selfishness; but had she shown one spark of real feeling towards him he would have forgotten all in the eager desire to improve her. She had not, and he was grievously disappointed.

In the mean time there was great confusion in the house. Miss Wybeer was undoubtedly very ill; she had overtired herself; most probably obtained a chill in her long night drive, and the excitement of the last hour had increased the fever to an alarming extent. There was no one in the house to take the command:

neither Pedro nor John the forester were fit nurses for the sick lady, and the old woman, moved by superstitious fear, refused to go near her. After a consultation with the Major the lawyer resolved, that since Miss Wybeer had placed in his hands her will and last directions, at once to assume the control. Of prosecution there was no thought; no one would have had the heart to disturb the dying woman, and though both Pedro and John the forester offered to stand their trial, if thereby their mistress could be spared, the gentlemen agreed that, as they had erred from their fidelity to her, no further notice should be taken of the matter.

Isabella eagerly undertook the nursing. When these arrangements were communicated to Miss Wybeer she quietly acceded, only stipulating that a certain Mrs. Cumston should be sent for, who, on arriving, turned out to be the same old Biddy, at whose cottage Major Kempthorn had sought aid when his carriage broke down on the moor, and where he had first seen Ruth Wybeer. An old tenant of the Berriton family, as her parents had been before her, she had known something of the tales of an earlier generation—and Miss Wybeer had found her house convenient to stay at, whenever her restless mood took her down to the neighbourhood of Cairniebrow Hall. She was a thoroughly respectable old dame, the very person those who now had the command would have chosen to take charge of the household and its mistress.

Matters being thus comfortably settled for the present, three days later the party at Coon Hall broke up, Alice and Max returning to their respective homes, where indeed it was time that they reappeared; the

strangest tales having been afloat as to their absence, one of which, purporting to come from a true source, declared that the Major having positively refused to allow a union between Miss Montague and Captain Thesiger, they had run away and got married elsewhere. Herbert went back to Cambridge; his father and Mr. Thornby remaining a few days longer at the Hall, then they each returned to their work. Isabella, at her own request, did not leave Miss Wybeer; there was no danger in her residence at Coon, Mrs. Cumston was quite capable of taking care of her, and the Major could come backwards and forwards: if he at first doubted the expediency of such close intimacy with a lady of Miss Wybeer's superstitious temper for an already gloomy nature like Isabella's, he was reassured when, on his frequent visits, he found how much gentler and less desponding she was growing; while Ruth, on her part, clung more and more to her young attendant, whom — for she often wandered — she mistook sometimes for her long-lost sister, sometimes for the great-aunt whose portrait she had possessed for so many years.

She lingered longer than they had expected; as so often happens, after the first great break-up, it is some time ere the final change comes; thus it was Christmas time before one morning the Major received a letter from his ward telling him that all was over. It was written in a very different spirit to the one he had had from her on a similar subject but a few months before; the energy remained, but the hardness was gone.

He set out at once for Coon Hall, expecting to find that now the strain was over she would break down.

It was not so; she was looking worn and ill, but calm, and resolved on being present at the funeral, where, besides Mr. Thornby and Captain Thesiger, there were present Major Kempthorn and his son. It appeared as if Alice could not escape retributive justice, for so much had she weakened herself by her violent emotion that on her return home she had been prostrated by a sharp, feverish attack, which had left her too delicate to come out.

Then they read the will; she left Coon Hall and all its dependencies, and all her money, except £1000 and a few legacies, to her great-nephew, Maximilian Thesiger; the £1000 to her great-niece, Alice Montague; £100 to Pedro, and smaller legacies to other servants and Mrs. Cumston, the care of all of whom she strongly enjoined upon her heir. In a few lines, traced only the day before her death, she thanked Isabella Berriton for her care, and gave to her her black cat, which, she said, was a descendant of one given by the first Berriton who had married a Wybeer to the family of his bride, and which she, the last Wybeer, gave to the last of the Berritons in token of peace and goodwill. Isabella took the cat and the paper with tearful eyes. Max then proceeded to make such arrangements as were necessary for the present. He settled with Mr. Thornby to find a home for the old woman and the coachman; John he offered to take into his service as gamekeeper and forester, which offer he was delighted to accept, his father having served in a similar capacity under the captain's father. He begged his new employer to excuse his having wounded him, which Max, frankly extending

his hand, declared he would forget, and that if John served him with the same fidelity that he had done his old mistress he would be well content.

When the same offer was made to Pedro he looked doubtful; he thanked Captain Thesiger for his kindness, but said that if Miss Berriton was likely to have an establishment he should so wish to take service under her, the person most dearly loved by his adored mistress.

The Major, struck by the request and the earnest manner of making it, engaged the man on the spot as Isabella's especial groom and attendant.

And now the Kempthorns were once again awaiting the arrival of their strange inmate. Mrs. Kempthorn was wishing they would come, fully expecting a worn-out invalid. Grace longed for, and yet dreaded their return; if Isabella could but have stayed away altogether Grace would have placed her in her list of heroes. The carriage drew up; Mrs. Kempthorn went to the door; but as Isabella embraced her she felt in a moment it was not the cold-hearted girl she had parted with; and her greetings to the others were the warmest they had ever received from her; to Alice she was particularly kind.

Grace went with her to her room, but neither now nor at any other time would she give that full account of her adventures that they all desired; she shrank back as if with pain whenever the subject was touched upon, and the young people were obliged to be contented with what they could gain from Alice, Herbert and Max being as reserved on the subject as the Major.

CHAPTER XXII.

"*Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?*
Was ever woman in this humour won?"—'Richard III.'

It was spring time; one of those fine warm April days which we enjoy half-tremblingly, for it is out of season, we say, and we fear the genial sunshine may be followed by keen winds or biting frost. Especially lovely are such days by the seaside, when a golden mist envelopes the cliffs, when the water lies sparkling and glimmering, and where are none of those bare brown trees which tell you that, whatever may be appearances, winter is not gone yet.

Up and down on the beach, close where the waves broke, walked Grace Kempthorn and Isabella Berriton talking earnestly, yet keeping heedful watch over a party of small sisters and cousins, of whom Grace had the charge. The months that had passed from Christmas to April had done much for them both; contact with Isabella had worn away many of Grace's little vanities, and given a depth to her character that had been wanting to it before, while for Isabella they had done more; she had learnt a terrible lesson, and she trembled to think how near she had been to the edge of the precipice. She had seen the effect of morbid musing upon the irremediable past. Miss

Wybeer's reason had tottered under the weight imposed upon it; might not her own have broken? With this knowledge vanished her despairing feeling of being responsible for actions done years before she was born. She was not a favourite with her companions; no one with her rigid exactness can be; but she had learnt to love. She regarded Alice with a kind of protecting affection. There were two people she had admitted into her inmost heart, Grace and the Major; to them, and to them alone, at rare intervals she spoke of Miss Wybeer, or told some of the family tales, on which she had received so sudden, so startling a light. The Major was quite contented with the amendment, saying, that he would willingly leave the rest to that very superior man whom Isabella was to meet some day and somewhere, and who would at once understand her, and to whom she would yield all her affections.

Presently the two girls separated; Grace returning home with her charge, Isabella remaining on the beach, attended by a young Newfoundland dog of the Major's, which, by the law of contraries, attached himself to Miss Berriton rather than to his owner.

Grace had not gone very far along the road when she met her father and Max.

"Was not Miss Berriton with you?" said the latter.

"Yes; but she is taking a further walk."

"Then I shall find her on the beach," he said.

"She will not want your company," called Grace; "she especially desired to be alone." But Max was already some way along the path leading to the beach.

"What can he want with Isabella?" said Grace. "How tiresome of him to go and worry her."

"I do not think he will worry her," answered the Major, and bending down, he whispered a few words in her ear.

She clapped her hands, crying: "Oh! I am so glad."

"Hush!" he said, "it is a profound secret as yet;" adding aloud, "Then I shall go as far as Captain Forrester's, and by the time I have transacted my business I dare say Isabella will be ready to come home."

On reaching the beach Max stood for a minute or two watching Isabella before she saw him. She was, as was her wont when alone, reading while she walked, but her dog companion refusing to leave her in peace she laid her book aside to throw sticks for him to fetch out of the water. When he came out dripping he not only shook himself over her, but sprang repeatedly upon her. He was too young to have learnt perfect obedience, and too strong to be held down by main force. The little dilemma she was in gave Max an excuse for stepping to her side, and compelling the animal down.

"Thank you," she said, "I could not manage him," a confession of inferiority she would hardly have made a few months back, at least to Max. He walked by her side, and after a minute, he said:

"Miss Berriton, you remember that pretty pair of small horses my aunt, Miss Wybeer, had?"

"Yes; Pedro told me that they would follow her about like a couple of dogs."

"I cannot find it in my heart to sell them," pursued Max, "yet I have no use for them."

"Well?" said Isabella, wondering to what this would lead.

"Miss Berriton, you would be conferring a great favour on me if you would accept them; with you I am certain they would be well tended and cared, for the sake of her to whom they belonged."

"I?—I cannot," she exclaimed in the first surprise; adding, "No, Captain Thesiger; if you wish to give them away it should be to Alice, your cousin, Miss Wybeer's niece."

"I would never give Alice anything that I cared about," he cried impetuously; "besides, she cannot drive. No; if you will not accept them they must be sold."

"But, Captain Thesiger," began Isabella, hesitatingly, "no. I will speak plainly, do you think it would be right for you to give me such a present?"

"Convenable?" said Max with a smile. "I have spoken to the Major, and he fully approves my intention."

"Then," said Isabella, extending her hand, "I will take them, and thank you for them; I shall always cherish them for her sake, who was so fond of them."

"And nothing at all for the sake of him who gives them to you," said Max, holding her fast.

"And for my friendship to you," said Isabella, blushing involuntarily.

"Friendship!" he repeated, "will you not give it a warmer name? Is it possible, Miss Berriton, that you have been ignorant of my feelings towards you

for these last months; feelings which your guardian has seen, and seeing them has approved?"

"Hush, sir," cried Isabella, springing back a few paces; "if you will not be true to Alice Montague I will. You have no right to say such words to me."

"True to Alice Montague, when she is not true to herself?" said Max bitterly. "Miss Berriton, you are mistaken if you think I am in any way bound to Miss Montague."

"Silence, sir," said Isabella imperatively, hurrying towards the path that led from the beach.

"Isabella, listen to me," pleaded Max; "I was deceived, as many a wiser man has been before me, by a pretty face; but I discovered the worthlessness of the heart, and thankful I am that I have known it in time."

She paused as if stunned; in spite of what the Major had said, in spite of appearances, she had cherished the hope that one day all would come right between them. Latterly she had been conscious at times of a warmer feeling in her heart towards Max, but she had repulsed it with shame and self-abhorrence; and now to hear him speak thus! He was continuing:

"When first I heard of our relationship I put the matter honestly before Alice; it needed but one word from her, and all my doubts would have vanished. She turned from me with the petulance of a spoilt child. I spoke to her again, but she would not listen to me; and I recognised what the Major had told me, that she was amused by me, but that she had no real

affection for me. I was free to seek happiness elsewhere."

This kind of reasoning might have been very dangerous with any one else, but with Isabella it answered; it convinced her strictly honest and upright mind that she was not wronging another.

Max saw that she was relenting, and said earnestly: "Miss Berriton, can you love me?"

"Holloa!" cried the Major from the road, "have you enjoyed your walk?" But when he saw the telltale expression on both faces, Isabella's still angry, Max's imploring, he judged it best to say no more; but, drawing his ward's arm through his own, moved along the road. Presently he asked: "Max, will you come in the evening?"

Before Max could answer an acquaintance stopped the Major, and the two walked on a few yards alone. Max took advantage of the moment to say: "Miss Berriton, may I come this evening?"

"If you please," she replied.

Max's heart throbbed, but the Major had disposed of his acquaintance and rejoined them. Never before had Max been so tired of his old friend, nor so heartily wished him elsewhere; but he would walk on, talking in the most prosaic way, until they reached their own garden, when either he saw a softening on Isabella's face, or else he really perceived something that needed his instant attention; for saying hastily to Max, "Then I shall see you this evening?" he sprang over the gate and disappeared.

"Then you will welcome me to-night?" Max said breathlessly.

"You have won your last victory over me, so be contented," she said, a sudden smile lighting up her whole face.

But, so far from being content, he caught both her hands.

"Now this is too bad," cried Isabella; "you should be more merciful on a conquered enemy."

"Enemy!" he repeated.

"Yes," she said; "for I have been your enemy, and I think you have been mine too; I do not mind telling you it now, though you have often made me heartily ashamed of myself." Steps were heard approaching. "You shall not exhibit me for your captive now, whatever you may do later," she exclaimed, and releasing herself, she hurried indoors.

When Max arrived that evening the Major was playing chess with Isabella, but on the Captain's appearance he rose, saying, "I shall resign my place."

"Wherefore?" she asked.

"My dear, I heard you talking to Max about his conquering you; of course that could only refer to chess. Max," he added aloud, "come here; finish this game, perhaps you may have better luck and win the day."

"Major!" exclaimed Isabella indignantly. All turned to look at her; but Grace, who was at the piano, played a number of chords, sufficiently startling to arrest the attention of all the musical members of the party.

"Max, why do you look so mischievous?" asked Florence, presently.

"He is thinking, my dear," said her father, "of

crowning his victory at chess by getting Isabella to accompany him when he sings."

Max turned this aside by saying, "If you will do me that favour I shall be but too glad."

To the surprise of all she, who was never known to touch a note, agreed. Her guardian said:

"Max, cannot you find some song about a knight storming a castle, and carrying away its fair owner as his prisoner? It would be the most appropriate for the present occasion."

"I shall certainly not accompany anything of the sort; it would be a libel on our sex," said Isabella wrathfully.

Alice's cheek had flushed during this scene, but she only beckoned to Grace to come to the sofa where she was reclining, for she was still far from strong, and the warm day had tired her. She whispered a few words to Grace, which the latter answered with a merry smile and a nod. Alice said no more then, but when she bid Isabella good night, she kissed her heartily, murmuring, "I am so glad!" Isabella started and coloured; she had not thought Alice was so quick-sighted.

In due course of time Isabella Berriton changed her name to Thesiger, and with the change lost the remainder of her melancholy morbidness. Strong in her husband's affection she gradually attained a steady cheerfulness; far removed from gaiety indeed, but equally distant from the sadness which had overshadowed her early years. Alice Montague languished for many months, but at last regained her health, awakening to new life, beauty, and affection. She had

learnt a bitter lesson in those weary weeks of sickness. The love that Herbert had spoken of as to raise her nature at last touched her heart, and he had the happiness to inspire it. At the touch like magic disappeared her vanity and selfishness, and to her happy and sunny disposition she added a self-denial and uprightness in which she had before been found so grievously wanting. She had always a warm friendship for Isabella, and when Max saw the good wife she made his cousin Herbert, he forgave her for the fickleness and heartlessness with which she had treated himself; and there ever after subsisted between them a cordial, kindly feeling.

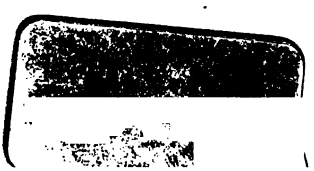
Grace, after being for some years longer the most useful member of her father's family, gave her hand to Captain Forrester, who had long loved her passionately, and as he imagined vainly, for in addition to being a capital officer he joined the recommendation of being a thoroughly modest man.

Mr. Thornby divided his holidays between his old friend Major, now Colonel, Kempthorn, and Cairniebrow Hall, for Max, after serving long enough to obtain his majority, had retired from the army; agreeing with his wife that the care of two large estates, and one so much neglected as Coon, required all the attention that one man could bestow upon them.

Mr. Thornby cynically declared that his attraction to Cairniebrow Hall was Pedro, now the faithful and attached servant of Major and Mrs. Thesiger, whom he loved to joke on how nearly he had been committed for manslaughter, in the matter of the wounding of Max; to talk over with him the old prophecies, and

to chuckle with him as they agreed, that the last mistress of Coon Hall in her own right had interpreted true, and that the fourth time two persons, in whose veins ran the blood of Wybeer and Berriton, joined their lots it had been productive of nothing but happiness to themselves and all about them. And the correct rendering of the old saw went thus :—

"For there is justice under Heaven,
And to us it shall be given;
For all our foes are gone
When the last Wybeer's heir weds the last Berriton."

THE END.

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